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HONORÉ DE BALZAC

LE CURÉ DE TOURS

(The Parish Priest of Tours)

TRANSLATED BY

COLONEL A. G. CHESNEY

AND


COMMANDANT A. RICHARD



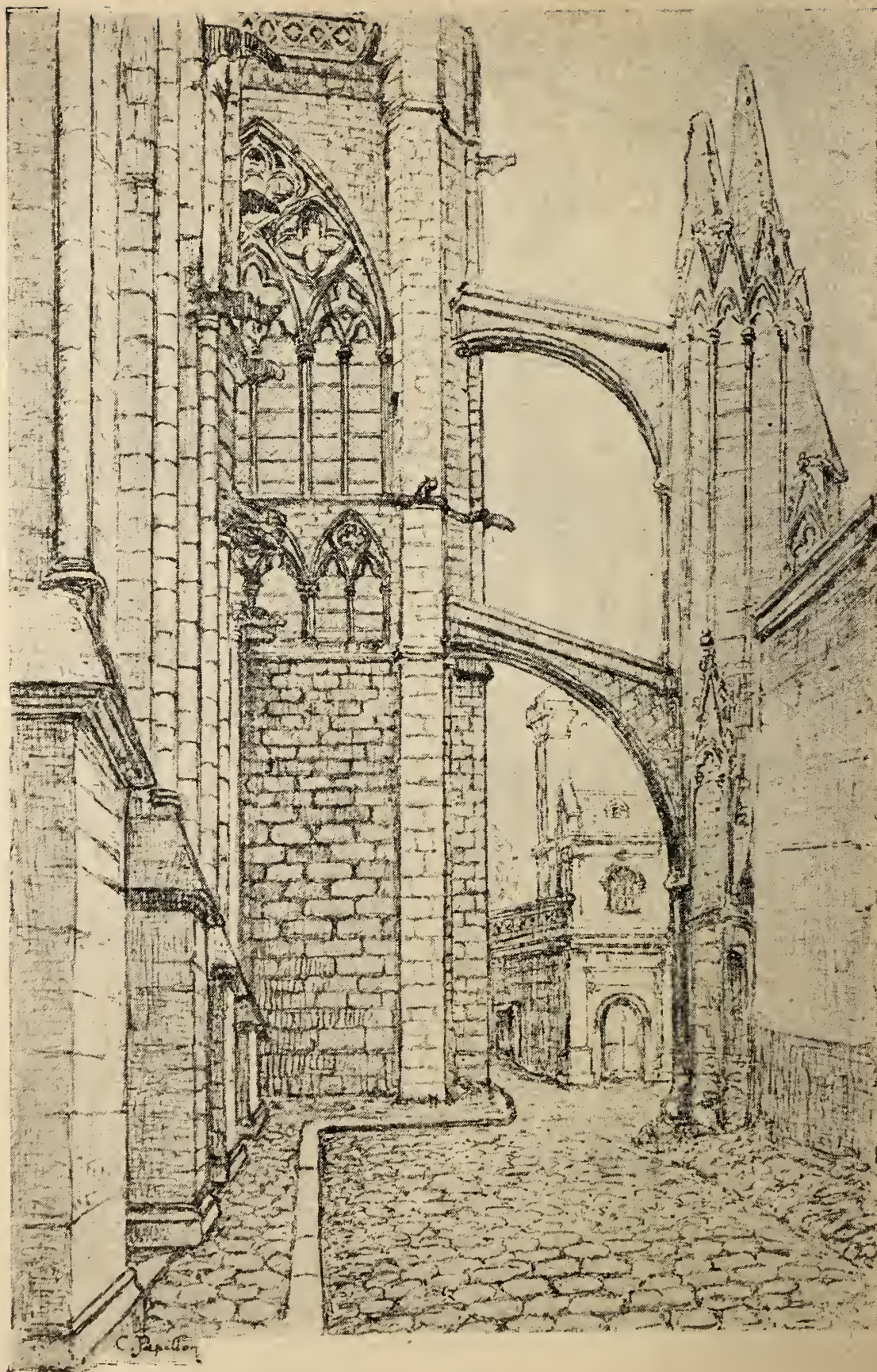
TOURS

TH. TRIDON, BOOK'SELLER

49, RUE NATIONALE, 49



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Honoré de Balzac

Médaille par David d'Angers

TO DAVID, SCULPTOR

The life of this work in which I am inscribing your name, — twice illustrious during this century — is anything but certain ; whilst you are engraving mine on a bronze medallion which outlives nations, even if wrought by the coiner's vulgar hammer. Will not the numismatist be puzzled at so many laurel-wreathed heads in your Studio when, — amongst the ashes of Paris, — they find these beings which you have perpetuated beyond the life of races and in which they will be wanting to discover dynasties ? To you, therefore, is this inviolable privilege, to me the acknowledgment.

DE BALZAC.

THE PARISH PRIEST OF TOURS

Early in the autumn of the year 1826, the Abbé Birotteau, the principal character in this tale, was caught by a heavy shower while returning from the house where he had been passing the evening. He was, therefore, crossing as fast as his *embonpoint* would allow of, the deserted little square called « Le Cloître », which lies behind the apse of S^t Gatien, at Tours.

The Abbé Birotteau, a stumpy little man of an apoplectic temperament and of about sixty years of age, had already experienced several attacks of gout. Now, of all the little inconveniences this life is heir to, that for which the good priest had the greatest aversion was the unexpected wetting of his amply silver-buckled shoes and the soaking of their soles. Indeed, notwithstanding the flannel socks in which his feet were at all times wrapped with that care which clerics take of themselves, a little damp

frequently got in, and on the morrow gout infallibly gave him some proofs of its constancy. Nevertheless, as the pavement of the « Cloître » is always dry and the Abbé had won three livres and ten sous at whist, at Madame de Listomère's, he bore the rain with resignation from the middle of the « Place de l'Archevêché » where it had begun to fall heavily. Besides, at that moment, he was cherishing his chimera, a wish now of twelve years existence, a priest's wish ! a wish that given vent to every evening, then seemed near of accomplishment. In short, he had wrapped himself up too cosily in his Canon's fur to feel the inclemency of the weather. During the evening the « habitués » of Madame de Listomère's had almost guaranteed to him his nomination to the Canonry then vacant in the Metropolitan Chapter of St Gatien, by proving to him that no one deserved it more than he whose claims for so long disregarded were incontestable. If he had lost at play, if he had heard that the Abbé Poirel, his rival, was being made a Canon, the good man would have then found the rain very cold. Perhaps he might have cursed his own existence. But he happened to be in one of those moods so rare in life when pleasant sensa-

tions cause everything else to be forgotten. In quickening his pace he conformed to a mechanical movement, and truth, so essential in a character story, compels us to say that he thought neither of the gout nor of the rain.

On the Grand'rue side of the Cloître there were formerly, and connected by an enclosure, several houses belonging to the Cathedral where some dignitaries of the Chapter lived. After the alienation of the property of the clergy, the passage separating these houses was turned into a street, called the *Rue de la Psalette*, which leads from the Cloître to the Grand'rue. This name shows pretty clearly that it was here the Choir Master with those under his dependence used to dwell and also had his schools. The left hand side of this street is taken up by a single house, the walls of which are built into by the flying buttresses of St Gatien which stand in its narrow little garden, in such a way as to leave one in doubt whether the cathedral was built before or after this antiquated dwelling. But on examination of the sculpture, the shape of the windows, the arch of the door, and the exterior of this weather-worn house, an archæologist would recognise that it has always formed a part of the magnifi-

cent monument with which it is united. An antiquary, if there was one at Tours, one of the least literary towns of France, could even recognise at the entrance of the passage in the *Cloître* some vestiges of the arcade which in olden times used to form the gateway of these ecclesiastical habitations, and was presumably in harmony with the general character of the building.

This house, lying on the north side of St Gatien, is continually in the shadow cast by this fine cathedral, on which time has thrown its dark mantle, left its scars, and established its damp cold, its mosses and long grass. This dwelling, moreover, is invariably wrapped in a deep silence, interrupted only by the sound of the bells, by the chanting of the services which rises over the walls of the church, or by the chattering of the jackdaws which nest at the top of the towers. This spot is a stony desert, a solitude full of expression and which can only be lived in by beings who have arrived at a complete state of nothingness, or are endowed with a tremendous strength of mind. The house in question had always been occupied by priests and belonged to an old maid called Mademoiselle

Gamard. Although this property had been acquired from the nation during the Terror by Mademoiselle Gamard's father, since for twenty years this old lady had priests living there, no one under the Restoration thought for a moment of taking exception to a devotee retaining property that had belonged to the church: perhaps the church people imagined it was her intention to bequeath it to the Chapter, whilst those of the outside world did not notice any change in the use it was put to.

Now, the Abbé Birôtteau was making for the house where he had been living for the past two years. His rooms had been, as was then the Canonry, the object of his desire and his *hoc erat in votis* for the past twelve years. To be Mademoiselle Gamard's lodger and to become a Canon were the two chief objects of his life and perhaps they exactly sum up the ambition of a priest, who, regarding himself as on a journey towards Eternity, can only wish in this world for a snug abode, a good table, clean clothes, silver-buckled shoes, things sufficient to the needs of the beast, and a Canonry to satisfy the *amour propre*, that indescribable feeling which we are always affected by, so they say, even in

the presence of God, since there are degrees among saints. But this longing for the apartment then inhabited by the Abbé Birotteau, a mere trifle in the eyes of the man in the street, had been a passion with him, a passion beset with obstacles, and like the most licentious of passions, full of hope, pleasure, and remorse.

The arrangement and size of the house inside did not permit of Mademoiselle Gamard having more than two lodgers. Now, some twelve years before the time that Birotteau became her lodger she had undertaken to keep the Abbés Troubert and Chapeloud in good health and spirits. The Abbé Troubert was still living. The Abbé Chapeloud was dead, and Birotteau had immediately succeeded him. The late Abbé Chapeloud, during his time as Canon of St Gatien, had been the Abbé Birotteau's great friend. Whenever the Curate came to see the Canon he invariably admired his apartment, the furniture and the library. One day, from this admiration, sprung the desire to possess these things. It was impossible for the Abbé Birotteau to suppress this wish which often made him suffer horribly when he came to think that the death of his best friend would alone appease this secret covetous-

ness, but which always kept growing in him. The Abbé Chapeloud and his friend Birotteau were not well off. Both sons of peasants they had nothing besides the small emolument allowed to priests, and their meagre savings were used up during the unfortunate period of the Revolution. When Napoleon restored the Catholic worship, the Abbé Chapeloud was appointed Canon of Saint Gatien and Birotteau became the curate of the cathedral. Chapeloud then went to lodge at Mademoiselle Gamard's.

When Birotteau came to visit the Canon in his new abode, he found the apartment very well arranged, but nothing else struck him about it. The commencement of this coveting of the furniture etcetera may be compared to that of the genuine passion in a young man, which begins sometimes by a cold admiration for the woman whom later he steadfastly loves.

This apartment, served by a stone staircase, was in a part of the house that had a southern aspect. The Abbé Troubert occupied the ground floor, and Mademoiselle Gamard the first floor of the principal house in the street. When Chapeloud came into his tenement the rooms were bare and the ceilings blackened by smoke.

The badly carved stone chimney pieces had never been painted. All the furniture the poor Canon put in at first was a bed, a table, some chairs, and the few books he possessed. The apartment resembled a beautiful woman in rags. But two or three years after, an old lady having left two thousand francs to the Abbé Chapeloud, he used this sum to purchase an oak book-case which came from a château that had been looted by the Black Band and was remarkable for its carving which was the admiration of artists. The Abbé made this acquisition, attracted less by its cheapness than by the way in which this piece of furniture fitted into the landing of his apartment. By saving up he was enabled to thoroughly restore this landing hitherto so wanting in appearance and neglected. The floor was carefully polished, the ceiling whitened, and the woodwork painted to represent the color and graining of oak. A marble chimney piece replaced the old one. The Canon had sufficient taste to look out for and pick up some old carved walnut wood arm-chairs. Then a long ebony table and two pieces of Boulle furniture put a finishing touch by giving a characteristic look to the landing. Within two years the generosity

of several devout people and some legacies from his pious penitents filled the empty shelves with books. Lastly, Chapeloud's uncle, a former Oratorian, left him his edition of *les Pères de l'Eglise* and several other large works so valuable to an ecclesiastic. Birotteau, more and more surprised by the transformation of this once bare landing, gradually attained to an involuntary covetousness. He desired to possess this collection which was so much in keeping with the importance of ecclesiastical principles.

From day to day this passion kept increasing. Occupied for whole days in working in this retreat, the curate after having first admired the convenient arrangements, was able to appreciate the silence, and the peace. During the following years the Abbé Chapeloud turned a small room into an Oratory which his pious friends took pleasure in embellishing. Later still, a lady gave the Canon a piece of furniture for his bedroom covered with tapestry that she had, for some time past, been working under the very eyes of the amiable man without his suspecting her intention.

As with the landing so did the bedroom dazzle the curate. At length, three years before his

death, the Abbé Chapeloud had finished making his apartment comfortable by decorating the drawing-room. Though simply upholstered with red Utrecht velvet the furniture attracted Birotteau. From the day the Canon's companion saw the red figured silk curtains, the mahogany furniture, the Aubusson carpet which enriched this large newly painted room, Chapeloud's apartment became with him the object of a secret monomania. To live there, sleep in the heavy silk curtained bed where the Canon used to sleep, and find all his comforts around him as Chapeloud did, was for Birotteau complete happiness : he looked no further than that. Of the things of this world which tend to produce envy and ambition in the hearts of other men, in the Abbé Birotteau all were concentrated in the hidden and intense desire to possess a home such as that which the Abbé Chapeloud had made. When his friend was ill he certainly came to his house induced by real affection, but on hearing of the Canon's ailment or while keeping him company, there arose in his mind, in spite of himself, a thousand thoughts of which the simplest was always : « If Chapeloud were to die, I could have his rooms. » However, as Birotteau had a good

heart, strict ideas, and a limited intelligence, he did not go so far as to conceive the means of getting his friend to bequeath his library and furniture to him.

The Abbé Chapeloud, an egotist of a kind and indulgent nature, guessed his friend's passion, which was not difficult, and forgave him for it, which may seem less easy to do in the case of a priest. But the curate, too, whose friendship always remained the same, did not discontinue to take his daily stroll with his friend along the *Mail de Tours*, (1) without ever vexing him for a single moment of the time set apart for this walk during the past twenty years. Birotteau, who regarded his involuntary wishes as faults, would by way of self reproach have been capable of the greatest devotion to the Abbé Chapeloud. A few days before his death, the latter paid his debt towards a so frank and sincere friendship by saying to the curate, who was then reading the *Quotidienne* to him : — This time you will have the apartment; I feel that all is over with me. — In fact, in his will, the Abbé Chapeloud left his library and furniture to Birot-

(1) Now the Boulevards Béranger and Heurteloup.

teau. The possession of these things, so keenly wished for, and the prospect of being taken as a boarder by Mademoiselle Gamard, much softened the grief which the loss of his friend the Canon had caused to Birotteau. He would not perhaps have raised him from the dead, but he mourned for him. For several days he was like Gargantua, whose wife had died in giving birth to Pantagruel, not knowing whether he ought to rejoice at the birth of his son or grieve over having buried his good Badbec, and who made the mistake of exulting over his wife's death and deploring the birth of Pantagruel.

The Abbé Birotteau passed the early days of his mourning in going over the works of *his* library, in using *his* furniture, in examining them, in saying in a tone which, unfortunately cannot be put down here. « Poor Chapeloud ! » In short, his joy and his grief took such a possession of him that he was not in the least disturbed at seeing another appointed to the Canonry in which the late Canon had hoped to have Birotteau as his successor. Mademoiselle Gamard, having willingly taken the curate as a lodger, the latter from that moment partook of all the happiness of the quiet life the deceased Canon used to tell him so much

about. Incalculable boons !! To hear the late Abbé Chapeloud, not one of all the priests living in the town of Tours, not even excepting the Archbishop, could be the recipient of such tender and particular attention as Mademoiselle Gamard lavished upon her two lodgers. The first words the Canon used to say to his friend when taking their walk on the *Mail*, almost always had to do with the succulent dinner he had just had, and during the seven walks of the week, it was very rare that he did not say to him at least fourteen times : « This excellent damsel has certainly the vocation of catering to the needs of the clergy ».

— « Just think », the Abbé Chapeloud used to say to Birotteau, « that for twelve consecutive years I never wanted for any linen, albs, surplices or *rabats*(1). I always found every thing in its place, in sufficient number, and smelling of orris root. My furniture is always polished, and so well wiped that for a long time past I have never known any dust upon it. Have you ever seen a single speck in my apartment ? Then, the firewood is well selected, the most trifling things are excellent ; in short, it seems that Mademoiselle Gamard never

(1) The white-edged black collar bands which French priests wear.

ceases to keep an eye upon my rooms. I do not remember, in ten years, having rung twice to ask for anything. That is the way to live ! To have nothing to think about, not even one's slippers ! To find always a good fire and a good table. Once, when my bellows did not work well, its tube being out of order, I had not to complain of it a second time. Why ! Next day, Mademoiselle Gamard gave me a very neat bellows and this pair of tongs with which I am now poking the fire. »

All Birotteau used to say in reply was : « Smelling of orris root ! » This smelling of orris root always obsessed him. The Canon's words acted like a fantastic pleasure upon the poor curate, whose head was turned by the « rabats » and the albs, for he was not himself methodical and often enough forgot to order his dinner. For example, whilst making the collection, or saying Mass, whenever he saw Mademoiselle Gamard at Saint Gatien, he never failed to turn a sweet and benevolent look upon her, such as Saint Theresa could cast towards heaven.

Although the comfort that every being longs for, and he had so often dreamed of, had come at last, since it is difficult for anyone, even a priest,

to get along without some hobby, the Abbé Biroteau had, for the past eighteen months, replaced his two wishes which were now gratified, by the desire for a Canonry. The title of Canon had become for him what a peerage would be to a minister of plebeian origin. Moreover, the probability of his being appointed, and the hopes that had just been held out to him at Madame de Listomère's had so turned his head, that it was only upon reaching his house he noticed having forgotten his umbrella. Perhaps, even apart from the rain which was coming down in torrents, he would not have remembered it, so absorbed was he in the pleasure of repeating to himself what the people who go to Madame de Listomère's, the elderly lady at whose house he had been passing this Wednesday evening, had said to him about his preferment. The curate rang loudly as if to intimate to the servant not to keep him waiting. Then he squeezed himself close up to the corner of the door, so as to get as little wet as possible, but the water dripping from the roof ran just on to the toes of his shoes, whilst intermittent puffs of wind blew the rain on to him like a douche. After having calculated the time requisite to come from the kitchen and pull the cord that

unlatches the door, he rang again so as to make a good noise. — « They cannot be out, » said he to himself on hearing no movement within. And for the third time he recommenced ringing, the din resounding sharply in the house and being so faithfully reechoed in the cathedral that at this unusual clamour it was impossible not to wake up. So, a few moments afterwards, with a certain amount of pleasure not unmixed with annoyance, he heard the clattering of the domestic's sabots on the little cobble pavement. The troubles of the gouty old man however, did not end as soon as he had anticipated. Instead of just pulling the cord, Marianne was obliged to turn the heavy key in the lock and undo the bolts.

— How is it you leave me thus to ring three times and in such weather, said he to Marianne.

— But, sir, you know very well, the door was locked. Everyone is in bed long ago, it has struck the third quarter after ten o'clock. Mademoiselle must have thought that you had not gone out.

— But you, yourself, saw me go out ! Besides, Mademoiselle knows very well that I go to Madame de Listomère's every Wednesday.

— Ma foi, Monsieur, I did as Mademoiselle told me to do, replied Marianne while closing the door.

— These words struck the Abbé Birotteau as unpleasantly as his reverie had made him supremely happy. He said nothing, but followed Marianne towards the kitchen to get his candlestick which he presumed had been put there. Instead, however, of going into the kitchen, Marianne led the abbé to his bedroom, where the curate saw the candlestick on a table standing near to the door of the red drawing room, in a sort of anteroom formed by the staircase landing which the late Canon had enclosed with glass. Speechless with surprise, he went straight into his bedroom and seeing the fire unlit, called out to Marianne who had not yet had time to get downstairs :

— You have not lit the fire, then? Said he.

— I beg your pardon, Monsieur l'Abbé, she replied, it must have gone out.

Birotteau looked again and made sure that the fire had not been lit since the morning.

— I want to dry my feet, he said, light the fire. Marianne obeyed with the alacrity of a sleepy individual. While looking for his slippers which he did not find in the centre of his bedside mat as they usually were, the Abbé threw out certain remarks in regard to Marianne's attire indicating

pretty clearly that she had not just got up out of bed, as she had been making out to him. He then recalled that during the past fortnight he had not been the recipient of those many little attentions which for eighteen months had made life so pleasant to bear. Now, since the nature of small-minded people leads them to guess at the meaning of mere trifles, he all of a sudden gave himself up to deep reflection upon the four circumstances, imperceptible to anyone else but which for him constituted four misfortunes. It was evident that his good luck had entirely forsaken him, in the forgetfulness as to his slippers, in Marianne's untruth in regard to the fire, in the unusual placing of his candlestick on the table in the anteroom, and in having kept him standing on his doorstep in the rain.

When the fire had burned up in the hearth, the lamp been lighted, and Marianne had left his room without asking as she used to do :

— « Does Monsieur require anything further? »
The Abbé Birotteau sank down softly into his deceased friend's capacious easy chair, but a touch of sadness accompanied his movement. The good man was oppressed by the presentiment of some terrible misfortune. His eyes in

turn sought the handsome wallclock, the chest of drawers, the couches, curtains, carpets, the *lit en tombeau*, (1) the Holy Water vessel, the Crucifix, a Virgin by Valentin, a Christ by Lebrun, in fact all the appurtenances of the room; and the expression of his countenance depicted the grief of the most tender farewell a lover may ever have made to his first mistress, or of an old man to the last trees he had planted. The curate was just recognising, a little late it is true, the signs of surreptitious persecution having been carried out against him for the past three months by Mademoiselle Garmard, whose malicious intentions would no doubt have been foreseen much sooner by a quicker witted man. Have not all old maids a certain faculty of accentuating the deeds and words which hate puts into their minds? They scratch like cats. Besides, they not only wound, but take pleasure in wounding and letting their victims see that they have wounded them. Where a man of the world would not let himself be clawed twice, Birotteau needed several scratches in the face before imagining any evil intent.

Whereupon, — with that searching penetra-

(1) An XVIII century square four posted bed having somewhat the appearance of a tomb.

tion which is acquired by priests who are accustomed to guide people's consciences and get to the bottom of the merest trifles in the confessional, — the Abbé Birotteau set to work to propound as if it were a question of controversy, the following proposition : admitting that Mademoiselle Gamard may not have thought about Madame de Listomère's party, that Marianne may have forgotten to light my fire, that they may have thought I had come in ; seeing that I had come down this morning, and I myself, had brought down my candlestick !! It is impossible that Mademoiselle Gamard, on seeing it in her drawing-room could have supposed that I had gone to bed. *Ergo*, Mademoiselle Gamard wished to leave me outside in the rain ; and in having my candlestick sent up to my room, she intended to let me know... What? said he aloud, carried away by the gravity of the situation while getting up to take off his wet clothes and put on his dressing-gown and night cap. Then he went from his bed to the fireplace, gesticulating and expatiating the following phrases, in various tones, which ended in a falsetto voice as if to take the place of interjections.

— What the deuce have I done to her? Why

is she so spiteful towards me ? Marianne ought not to have forgotten my fire ! Mademoiselle must have told her not to light it ! One would have to be a child not to see by the tone and manner she assumes with me that I have had the misfortune to displease her. Nothing similar ever happened to Chapeloud. It will be impossible for me to live amongst such worries that.. At my age !

He went to bed in the hope of clearing up next morning the cause of this spite which was destroying for ever the happiness he had been enjoying these past two years and which he had for so long wished. Alas ! The secret motives of the sentiment that Mademoiselle Gamard entertained would never be known to him, not that they were difficult to divine, but because the poor man lacked the candour with which generous natures and rogues know how to examine and pass judgment upon themselves. Only a man of genius or an intriguer would say : « I have been wrong ». Interest and talent are the only conscientious and rational advisers. But the Abbé Birotteau, whose kindness went even to stupidity, whose education in some respect was only veneered by dint of hard work, who had no experience of the world, nor of its customs, and who lived between Mass and

the confessional, very much employed in deciding the most trivial conscience cases, in his capacity as confessor to the boarding schools in the town and to some good souls who appreciated him, the Abbé Birotteau might be regarded as a big child to whom the major portion of the customs of society was completely foreign. But the egotism natural to all human creatures, accentuated by the egotism peculiar to a priest, and by that of the narrow life that is led in the provinces, had imperceptibly become developed in him without his having the least idea of it. If someone could have taken sufficient interest by thoroughly searching the curate's soul to demonstrate to him that in the infinitely petty details of his existence and in the very trifling duties of his private life, he essentially lacked that devotion which he thought he professed, he, the Abbé, would have punished and mortified himself, with a most contrite heart.

But those whom we offend, even without our knowledge, give small credit to our being innocent; they wish and know how to avenge themselves. Therefore Birotteau, however weak he might be, had to submit to the effects of this great distributive justice, which is always enjoin-

ing upon the world to carry out its decrees called by certain foolish people *the misfortunes of life*.

There was this difference between the late Abbé Chapeloud and the curate, that one was a clever and witty egotist, and the other a plain spoken and dull one. When the Abbé Chapeloud came as a boarder at Mademoiselle Gamard's he knew exactly how to gauge his hostess's character. The confessionnal had enabled him to perceive that her not being received in the best society somewhat embittered the old maid, so he comported himself with circumspection at Mademoiselle Gamard's. His hostess, then barely thirty eight years of age was still inclined to be a little pretentious, which among reserved persons changes later on into a high esteem for themselves. The Canon recognised that in order to get on well with Mademoiselle Gamard he would always have to pay her the same attention and treat her with the same deference, to be more infallible than the Pope, in fact. To obtain this result he arranged that their meetings should be merely such as politeness demanded and are called for between persons living under the same roof.

Thus, although the Abbé Troubert and he took

three meals a day regularly, he did not appear at breakfast but arranged for Mademoiselle Gamard to send a cup of coffee with hot milk to his bedroom before he got up. Then he used to avoid the tediousness of supper by always taking tea in the houses where he passed the evenings. Thus he used rarely to see his hostess at any other hour of the day than at dinner, but he invariably came some minutes before the time. During this kind of courteous visit to her and throughout the twelve years which he passed under her roof, he used to address the same questions to her and receive the same replies. As to how Mademoiselle Gamard had slept during the night, her breakfast, the little domestic arrangements, her books, her health, the weather, the length of the services, the incidents of the Mass, and lastly the health of such and such a priest, provided the whole of this periodical conversation. During dinner he used to go on always with some indirect flattery, passing continually from the relish of a fish, the good taste of its seasoning, or the ingredients of a sauce, to the qualities of Mademoiselle Gamard and to her virtues as mistress of a house. He made a point of flattering this old maid's vanity by eulogising the skill with which her jams, gherkins, pre-

serves, pies and other gastronomic contrivances were made or prepared. In short, the wily Canon never left his hostess's yellow drawing room without remarking that in no house in Tours did one get such good coffee as that which he had just tasted. Thanks to this thorough understanding of Mademoiselle Gamard's character and to the mode of life followed by the Canon during the past twelve years, there was never any cause of difference about the smallest matters between them. The Abbé Chapeloud had from the first recognised the prim, sour, and hard nature of this old maid, and regulated the inevitable tangents between them so as to obtain from her all the concessions requisite to the happiness and tranquillity of his life. Also, Mademoiselle Gamard used to say that the Abbé Chapeloud was a most kind man, extremely easy to live with, and most genial. As to the Abbé Troubert, the pious woman used to say absolutely nothing about him. Completely taken up in the routine of his life, like a satellite in its planet's orbit, Troubert was for her a sort of intermediate creature between individuals of the human and canine races; he was classed in her heart immediately before the place set apart for her friends and that occupied by a fat, wheezing pug she wa

very fond of : she ruled him entirely, and their interests became so much in common that many people of Mademoiselle Gamard's circle thought that the Abbé Troubert had some designs upon the old maid's fortune, in which he persevered with constant patience, and directed her the more easily as he seemed to obey her, without betraying the slightest wish to guide her.

When the Abbé Chapeloud died, the old maid, who wished to have a well mannered lodger, naturally thought of the curate. The Canon's will had not even been disclosed when Mlle Gamard was already contemplating giving the deceased's apartment to the good Abbé Troubert, whom she considered was not well off on the ground floor. But when the Abbé Birotteau came to draw up the written agreement with the old maid as to his board, she saw he was so much bent upon this apartment for which he had for so long fostered a longing, the fervour of which could not then be doubted, that she did not dare to speak to him of an exchange and let inclination give way to the exigencies of interest. In order to console the very dear Canon, Mademoiselle replaced the large white Château Renaud tiles which paved his apartment by a parquet floor of Hun-

garian oak, and reconstructed a chimney which used to smoke.

The Abbé Birotteau had been seeing his friend Chapeloud for the past twelve years without thinking of inquiring the reason for this extreme circumspection in his relations with Mlle Gamard. On coming to live at this saintly maid's house, he found himself in the position of a lover on the point of being made happy. Even if he had not been naturally dull of understanding, his eyes were too dazzled by his good luck to be able to judge Mlle Gamard, or reflect upon the limit he should put upon his daily relations with her. Mlle Gamard seen from afar and through the prism of that material happiness which the curate dreamt of tasting when under her roof, appeared to him to be a perfect creature, a thorough Christian, an essentially charitable being, the woman of the Gospel, the wise virgin, clothed with her humble and modest virtues, which diffuse a heavenly perfume throughout life. Besides, he entered into the life at Mlle Gamard's with all the enthusiasm of a man who had reached a long wished for goal, with the candour of a child, and the silly thoughtlessness of an old man lacking worldly experience, just as a fly is caught in a

spider's web. Thus, the first day when he came to dine and sleep at the old maid's house, he was detained in her drawing-room by the desire to make her acquaintance as well as by that inexplicable perplexity which often disconcerts shy people and makes them afraid of being impolite by interrupting a conversation to go out.

Consequently, he remained there all the evening. Another old maid, a friend of Birotteau's, called Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix, came during the evening. Mademoiselle Gamard had the pleasure of getting up a game of Boston at her house. The curate, on going to bed, discovered that he had passed a very pleasant evening,

Only knowing Mademoiselle Gamard and the Abbé Troubert very slightly as yet, he perceived their characters but superficially. Few people show up their faults openly at first. Generally each tries to display an attractive exterior. The Abbé Birotteau, therefore, conceived the charming project of devoting his evenings to Mademoiselle Gamard, instead of passing them outside. His hostess had for some years past nurtured a wish which kept recurring more forcibly from day to day.

This wish, which old men and even pretty women have, had with her become a passion similar

to Birotteau's for the apartment of his friend Chapeloud, and was kept in the old maid's heart by feelings of pride and egotism, of envy and vanity, which have ever existed among people in good society.

This is the history of all time : one has only to slightly enlarge the narrow circle in which these people move to arrive at the combined motive for the incidents which take place in the highest circles.

Mademoiselle Gamard used to pass her evenings at six or eight different houses in turn. Either she regretted being obliged to go out into society and felt she had the right, at her age, to get some return for it; or her *amour propre* was offended at not having a regular circle of her own; or, after all, her vanity yearned for the courtesies and privileges enjoyed by her friends, for her whole ambition was to make her drawing room a meeting place where a certain number of people would come *with pleasure* every evening. When Birotteau and his friend Mlle Salomon had passed several evenings at her house, in company with the faithful and patient Abbé Troubert, one afternoon, while coming out of Saint Gatien, Mademoiselle Gamard said to the good friends whose slave she considered she had been up till then, that those who wished to see her might quite well come once a week to

her house, where a sufficiency of people was gathered to make up a game of Boston; she ought not to leave the Abbé Birotteau, her new boarder, alone; Mademoiselle Salomon had come to her every single evening during the week; she was devoted to her friends, and that, and that, etc..., etc...

Her words were all the more graciously condescending and profusely sugary since Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix belonged to the most aristocratic society in Tours. Although Mademoiselle Salomon came entirely out of friendship for the curate, Mademoiselle Gamard was triumphant at having her in her drawing room, and pictured herself, thanks to the Abbé Birotteau, as on the point of accomplishing her great design of forming a circle which might become as numerous, and as agreeable as Madame de Listomère's, Mademoiselle Merlin de La Blotière's, and other devout persons who were in the habit of receiving this pious society of Tours.

But alas ! the Abbé Birotteau was the cause of the miscarriage of Mademoiselle Gamard's hope. Now, if those, who having come into the enjoyment of a long wished for happiness during their lifetime have realized the joy the curate could have in sleeping on Chapeloud's bed, they would also

have some idea of the disappointment experienced by Mademoiselle Gamard at the upsetting of her favourite project. After having for six months, accepted his good fortune complacently enough, Birotteau deserted the abode, taking away Mademoiselle Salomon with him. In spite of unheard of efforts, the ambitious Gamard had only just managed to recruit five or six people, whose continued attendance was anything but certain, and four faithful souls at least were necessary to make up a game of Boston. She was therefore obliged to apologize openly and return amongst her old friends, for old maids are too bad company by themselves not to court the doubtful attractions of society.

The cause of this desertion is easy to comprehend. Although the curate was one of those to whom Paradise should some day belong, according to the decree : *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, he could not, like many fools, put up with being bored by other fools. Stupid people resemble weeds which luxuriate in good ground, and like to be amused just as much as they are dull themselves. The obsession of boredom, of which they are the victims, together with the need they feel to continually get away from themselves, gives

rise to this passion for movement, this necessity to be always elsewhere than where they are, which is a peculiarity of theirs, as it does in the case of individuals destitute of sentiment, and of those whose future has been a disappointment, or who are sufferers through their own fault.

Without going too deeply into the emptiness, the insignificance of Mademoiselle Gamard, nor without accounting for the paltriness of her ideas, the poor Abbé Birotteau recognised, unfortunately for him a little late, the faults she had in common with all old maids and those which were peculiar to herself. The evil, among others, is so markedly separated from the good, that it nearly always strikes us before inflicting an injury. This moral phenomenon would, if need be, justify the tendency which we have more or less to criticism.. Socially speaking, it is so natural to laugh at the imperfections of others, that we ought to forgive the bantering gossip which our own shortcomings justify and only be astonished at the calumny. But the good curate's eyes were never at that optical pitch which enables people in society to recognise and promptly avoid their neighbour's rough side; he was therefore obliged to submit, in order to know his hostess's faults,

to the admonition which nature gives to all its creations, *Sorrow*.

Old maids, not having made their character and their life to give way to another life, nor to other characters, as a wife's fate exacts, have, for the most part the craze to make everything around them give way. With Mademoiselle Gamard this sentiment degenerated into despotism; but this despotism was only vented on petty matters. For instance, among a thousand examples, the basket of markers and counters placed upon the Boston table for the Abbé Birotteau, ought to remain in the spot where she had put it, and the abbé annoyed her exceedingly in disarranging it, which occurred almost every evening. From whence came this stupid susceptibility about trifles and what was the reason for it? No one could tell. Mlle Gamard herself did not know. Although of a very easy, sheeplike nature, the new boarder did not like however to feel the shepherd's crook, any more than sheep do, especially when it is prickly. Without accounting for the Abbé Troubert's great patience, Birotteau wished to escape from the comforts Mlle Gamard attempted to dispense according to her lights, for she thought that comfort and

happiness were to be treated in the same manner as jam : but the unfortunate man owing to his simplicity acted rather awkwardly. This separation did not take place without many wrenches and pin-pricks, of which the Abbé Birotteau tried not to appear sensible.

At the end of the first year which he spent under Mlle Gamard's roof, the curate had resumed his old habits of passing two evenings each week at Madame de Listomère's, three at Mlle Salomon's, and the two others at Mlle Merlin de la Blottière's. These people belonged to the aristocratic portion of Tours society into which Mlle Gamard was never admitted. So, his hostess was exceedingly hurt by the desertion of the Abbé Birotteau, who thus let her feel how little she was appreciated by him; every preference implies a slight upon the person discarded.

— Monsieur Birotteau did not find us sufficiently attractive —, said the Abbé Troubert to M^{lle} Gamard's friends when she was obliged to give up her evenings. — He is a wit, a gourmet; he wants smart society, great comfort, sprightly conversation and the gossip of the town. —

These words tended to justify M^{lle} Gamard's good character at Birotteau's expense.

— « He is not so witty after all » she said. « Had it not been for the Abbé Chapeloud he would never have been received at Madame de Listomère's. Oh ! I have certainly lost in being deprived of the Abbé Chapeloud. What an agreeable man, so easy to live with. Indeed, for twelve years, I never had the least difficulty, nor unpleasantness with him ».

M^{lle} Gamard depicted the Abbé Birotteau so unflatteringly that the unsuspecting boarder was set down in this *bourgeois* society, secretly hostile to the aristocratic set, as an essentially captious man and very difficult to live with. Then, the old maid had for some weeks the pleasure of having herself pitied by her friends, who, without thinking of what they were saying, kept on repeating to her. « What ! you so gentle and so good, have you given offence !... »

Or : — « Console yourself, my dear M^{lle} Gamard, you are so well known that... », etc.

But, delighted to avoid spending one evening each week in the Cloister, the most deserted, the most out of the way spot from the centre of everything that there is in Tours, all blessed the curate. Among people constantly together, hatred and love keep continually increasing. Every moment reasons crop up for liking or disliking one another

more strongly. So the Abbé Birotteau became unbearable to M^{lle} Gamard. Eighteen months after having taken him as a boarder, at the moment when the good man thought he saw the peace of contentment in what was really the hatred of silence and was congratulating himself upon having known so well how to *twist in with the old maid's strand*, to use his own expression, he became the object of her surreptitious persecution and cold-blooded vengeance.

The four principal points of the door being closed, the slippers forgotten, his fire being neglected, and the candlestick taken up to his apartment, could at any rate reveal to him this dreadful aversion, the full consequences of which only struck him when they were irreparable. Therefore, while going off to sleep, the good curate racked his brains, but in vain, and certainly as they were rather limited he quickly arrived at no conclusion, so that he could not explain M^{lle} Gamard's singularly rude behaviour. In fact, having previously acted quite logically in following the dictates of his own selfishness, he could not conceive that he was guilty of any faults towards his hostess.

If important matters are easily understood and designated, the small affairs of life call for much

detail. The events which in some sort constitute the *stage-box* in this *bourgeois* drama, but in which passions are as violently displayed as if they had been aroused by great interests, have necessitated this somewhat lengthy beginning, and it would have been difficult for a faithful historian to have further restricted its unfolding.

Next morning, on awaking, Birotteau was so very much engrossed in his canonry that he did not give another thought to the four circumstances in which, on the evening before, he had discerned the ill-omened predictions of a future beset with misfortune. The curate was not a man to get up without a fire, so he rang to let Marianne know that he was awake, and for her to come. Then he used to go on dozing, as was his wont, wrapt in drowsy musings, while the servant began lighting the fire and gently roused him from this light slumber by the hum of her interpellations and movements, a kind of music that was pleasing to him. Half an hour elapsed without Marianne coming. The curate, half Canon we may say, was about to ring a second time, when he let go of the bell-rope on hearing the sound of a man's step on the stairs. In fact, the Abbé Troubert, after

having cautiously knocked at the door, came in at Birotteau's invitation.

This visit which the two abbés made once a month pretty regularly to each other, did not surprise the curate at all. The Canon at once expressed astonishment at Marianne not having yet lit his quasi colleague's fire. He opened a window, called sharply to Marianne and told her to come to Birotteau's room; then turning towards his compeer : — « If Mademoiselle knew that you had no fire, she would scold Marianne. »

After this remark, he asked after Birotteau's health and tenderly inquired if he had any fresh news which might give him hopes of being made a Canon. The curate told him what steps he had taken, and innocently who the people were with whom Madame de Listomère was working interest, quite forgetting that Troubert had never forgiven this lady for not having admitted him into her house, he, the Abbé Troubert, already twice designated to be Vicar General of the diocese.

It was impossible to meet with two faces offering such contrasts as those of these two abbés did. Troubert, tall and thin, had a sallow and bilious complexion, whilst the curate was what one would familiarly describe as plump. Round and ruddy

faced, Birotteau's countenance bespoke good nature without many ideas, whilst Troubert's, long and furrowed by deep wrinkles, exhibited now and then an expression full of irony or disdain, but one was obliged to regard it attentively to discern these two conditions of mind. The Canon usually maintained a perfect calm with his eyelids lowered over two orange colored eyes, which, at will, assumed a clear and piercing look. Reddish brown hair completed this gloomy countenance, ever clouded by that veil which deep meditation casts over the features. Many people thought at first that he was wrapped up in some great and profound ambition, but those who claimed to know him better had refuted this idea by proving that he was either rendered stupid by M^{lle} Gamard's despotism, or wearied by too much fasting. He rarely used to speak and never laughed. When he happened to be amused at anything, a feeble smile flitted across his features and dissolved into the wrinkles of his face. Birotteau, on the contrary, was thoroughly open hearted and free, loving tit bits, and being amused at the merest trifle with the simplicity of a man having no bitterness or malice. At first sight of the Abbé Troubert a feeling of involuntary fear was experienced, whilst in the case of the curate

a sweet smile pervaded those who saw him.

When the tall Canon used to walk with a solemn step under the arches and across the nave of Saint Gatien, with head bowed and a stern look in his eye, he aroused respect : his austere countenance harmonized with the curves of the cathedral's stately arches, the folds of his cassock having something monumental in them, akin to the statues. But the good curate moved about there without ostentation, he trotted, stamped about, and swung along.

Nevertheless, these two men had one resemblance. Just as Troubert's ambitious look, while conducing to his being feared, had perhaps contributed to condemn him to the insignificant part of a mere Canon, so Birotteau's character and appearance seemed to doom him for ever to the curacy of the Cathedral. However, the Abbé Troubert, then fifty years of age, had by his regular conduct, the appearance of a total lack of ambition and by his very saintly life, entirely dissipated the fears which his mistrusted ability and forbidding exterior had inspired in his superiors. His health too having become seriously impaired during the past year, his early advancement to the office of Vicar General to the Arch

bishop seemed assured. His opponents themselves wished for him to be appointed in order the better to prepare for it themselves during the short period that was likely to be vouchsafed to him by an illness which had become chronic. Far from offering the same hopes, Birotteau's triple chin indicated to his opponents for the Canonry a sign of flourishing health, and his gout seemed to them to be, according to the proverb, an assurance of long life. The Abbé Chapeloud, a man of sound judgment and who, on account of his genial nature had always been much sought after by a cheery set and the chief dignitaries of the Metropolitan See, had invariably been opposed, but secretly and with much weight, to the Abbé Troubert's advancement. He had very cleverly managed to exclude him from all the fashionable circles in which the best society of Tours mixed, although during his lifetime, Troubert had invariably treated him with great respect, and at the same time showed him the utmost deference. This constant submissiveness had not succeeded in changing the defunct Canon's opinion, for whilst taking his last walk he once more said to Birotteau : — « Beware of this lanky fellow Troubert. It is like Sixtus the

Fifth being reenacted in the case of the Bishopric. »

Such was M^{lle} Gamard's friend and fellow boarder, who came the very day after she had so to speak declared war against poor Birotteau, to visit and manifest his friendship for him.

« We must not blame Marianne », said the Canon as she came in... « I expect she began at my room ; my apartment is very damp and I have been coughing a good deal during the night. You are very healthily situated here », he added while looking up towards the ceiling.

— Oh ! I am in the capacity of a Canon here, answered Birotteau, smiling.

— And I of curate replied the humble priest.

— Yes ! But you will soon be living at the Archbishop's Palace, said the good priest who liked everyone to be happy.

— Oh ! or in the cemetery... But God's will be done ! And Troubert raised his eyes to heaven with a gesture of resignation.

— I came, he added, to ask you to lend me the *Pouiller des Evêques*. You are the only person in Tours who has this work.

(1) A register of the livings in a diocese with an account of their revenues.

— Take it from my library, said Birotteau, the Canon's remark reminding him of his chief pleasures in life.

The tall Canon went into the library and stayed there, while the curate was dressing. Soon the breakfast bell sounded, and the gouty curate thinking that without Troubert's visit he would not have had a fire to get up by, said to himself : « He is a good sort. »

The two priests went down together, each armed with a huge volume which they placed on one of the console tables in the dining room.

— What is that ? Asked Mlle Gamard, and addressing Birotteau in a sharp voice : I hope you are not going to crowd up my dining-room with your old books.

— They are some books that I want, said the Abbé Troubert ; the curate has been kind enough to lend them to me,

— I ought to have guessed that, said she, with a scornful smile, M. Birotteau does not often read those large books.

— How are you feeling, Mademoiselle ? resumed her boarder with a rather shrill voice.

— Not very well, she answered curtly... You were the cause of my being woke up out of my

first sleep yesterday and the whole of my night was disturbed in consequence.

On sitting down, Mademoiselle Gamard added :

— Gentlemen, the milk is getting cold.

Taken aback at being so sharply received by his hostess when he expected an apology, but alarmed, as timid people are, at the prospect of an argument especially when they are the subject of it, the poor curate sat down in silence. Then seeing that Mademoiselle Gamard's face showed signs of irritability, he was drawn two ways, right urging him not to put up with his hostess's want of consideration, whilst his disposition was to avoid a quarrel.

A prey to this anguish of mind Birotteau began attentively examining the deep green shading on the thick glossy taffeta silk, which according to time honored custom Mademoiselle Gamard used to leave on the table at breakfast, without heeding the frayed edges or the many patches there were on this cloth. The two boarders, each in a cane arm-chair sat opposite to one another at either end of this undoubtedly square table, the hostess in her well cushioned chair on castors and with her back to the stove sat between them at the head. This room and the general

drawing room were on the ground floor under the Abbé Birotteau's bed-room and sitting room.

When the curate had received his cup of coffee with sugar in it from Mademoiselle Gamard, he was chilled by the deep silence in which he was about to get through this usually cheerful meal. He did not dare look at Troubert's forbidding countenance nor at the old maid's threatening face, but for appearance sake turned towards a large pug, much run to fat, which lay on a cushion near to the stove and never moved from it, always finding a small plate filled with dainties on his left and a bowl full of clean water on his right

— Well, my little pet, he said, you are waiting for your coffee?

This personage, one of the most important in the house, but rather an annoying one as he no longer barked and allowed his mistres to have the monopoly of the conversation, looked up at Birotteau out of his small eyes which were sunk in the layers of fat on his head. He then slyly closed them. To understand the poor curate's suffering it is necessary to explain that being gifted with a garrulous and resonant lo-

quacity, which for comparison may be likened to the reverberation of an india rubber ball, he stated, without being able to furnish the doctors with a single reason for his opinion, that talking aided digestion. Mademoiselle, too, who agreed with this hygienic doctrine, used always, in spite of their misunderstanding, to talk during meals ; but for several mornings past the curate had exerted his wits in vain in putting wily questions to her with a view to drawing her out.

If the narrow limits to which this tale is restricted had admitted of the reproduction of even one of these conversations, which almost invariably brought forth a sour and sardonic smile from the Abbé Troubert, it would have presented a perfect picture of the boorish life led by the people of the provinces. Some persons with a sense of humour would hear, not perhaps without some amusement, of the strange deductions that the Abbé Birotteau and M^{lle} Gamard gave to their personal opinions on politics, religion, and literature. There would unquestionably be something comical to expose : whether the reasons these two had for really doubting as to the death of Napoleon in 1826, or the surmises that induced them to believe in the existence of Louis XVII

who was saved in a large hollow log. Who would not have laughed to hear them establishing, by reasons quite clear to themselves, that the king of France alone disposed of all the taxes, that the *Chambres* met in order to ruin the clergy, that more than thirteen hundred thousand persons died on the scaffold during the Revolution. Then they used to talk about the Press without knowing the number of newspapers there were, or having the least idea as to what constituted this modern instrument. Yet, Monsieur Birotteau used to listen attentively to M^{lle} Gamard, when she said that a man who took an egg every morning would certainly die at the end of a year and that it had been known to happen; that a little light bread, eaten for several days without drinking, cured sciatica; that all the workmen who had been employed in pulling down the abbey church of Saint Martin, had died within a period of six months: that a certain magistrate, under Bonaparte, had done everything in his power to destroy the Saint Gatien towers, and a thousand other absurd stories.

But on this occasion Birotteau felt he had nothing to say. He was resigned therefore to eating

without making conversation. Soon he found this silence upsetting to his digestion and boldly said : — « This coffee is excellent. » — This courageous attempt was of no avail. After having looked out at the sky through the little space above the garden which separated the two sombre flying buttresses of saint Gatien, the curate again summoned up courage to say : — « It will be finer today than yesterday » — At this remark, Mlle Gamard merely cast one of her most gracious glances at the Abbé Troubert and then turned her eyes with a terribly severe look upon Birotteau who had fortunately lowered his.

No creature of the female kind was more capable of clearly exemplifying the mournful nature of the old maid than M^{lle} Gamard ; but in order to faithfully depict a being whose type lends a very great interest to the minor events of this drama and to the interior life of the persons who are the actors in it, it is perhaps desirable, here, to give a short epitome of the ideas which find expression in this old maid ; the daily life moulds the mind, and the mind is mirrored in the face. If everything in society as in the world must have a goal, here below, there are certainly

some beings whose purpose and use cannot be accounted for. Morals and political economy alike reject the individual who consumes without producing, who holds a place on the earth without diffusing either good or evil around him; for evil is without doubt a benefit of which the effects are not manifested at first. It is rare that old maids do not, of their own accord, establish themselves among this class of inefficient beings. Now, if the consciousness of his work gives a feeling of satisfaction to the efficient being which helps him to bear life, the certainty of being a burden or even useless must produce a contrary effect, and inspire in the indolent creature the contempt for himself which it excites amongst others. This severe social denunciation is one of the causes which, unknown to old maids, puts into their hearts the disappointment that is reflected in their faces. A preconceived opinion, in which there is perhaps some semblance of truth, more so in France than elsewhere, casts disparagement upon the woman with whom no one has cared to share the ups and downs of life. Now, a time comes for maidens when the world, wrongly or rightly, condemns them upon the disdain of which they are

the victims. If plain, their kindly disposition ought to make up for the shortcomings of nature : if pretty, there is bound to be good reason for their misfortune.

One cannot say which, the former or the latter, is more deserving of being rejected. If their celibacy has been reasonable, if it is due to a wish for independence, neither men nor mothers forgive them for being false to a wife's devotion in having denied themselves the passions which cause their sex to be so much sympathized with. To renounce participation in the trials of maternity is to abdicate from the poetry of it, and no longer be worthy of those sweet consolations to which a mother always has incontestable rights. Then the noble sentiments, the rare qualities of a wife are only developed by their constant exercise : in remaining a maiden, an individual of the female sex is nothing more than an absurdity ; an egotist and cold, she is a horror. This inexorable decree is unfortunately too just for old maids to be ignorant of its nature. These ideas spring up in their hearts as naturally as the effects of their dismal life are reproduced in their features. Then they go off in looks because the continual openheartedness or happiness which

brightens up the countenances of wives and gives such grace to their movements, has never existed in them. They then become sour and peevish, for a being who has missed his vocation is not happy; he suffers and suffering produces an ill-natured disposition. In fact before blaming herself for her isolation, a girl will for a long while charge the world with it. From accusation to a wish for vengeance, there is but a step. At last, the ungraciousness which pervades them becomes also a necessary consequence of their life. Having never felt the need to please, gracefulness and good taste are foreign to their natures. They see nothing beyond themselves. This sentiment conduces imperceptibly to their choosing things which are convenient to themselves to the detriment of those which might be pleasing to others. Without getting a clear idea as to their dissimilarity to other women, they end by perceiving and suffering for it. Jealousy is an ineffaceable feeling in the feminine breast. Old maids are therefore jealous without cause and only know the woes of the one passion which men forgive in the beautiful sex, because it flatters them. Thus foiled in all their wishes, obliged to deny themselves to the development of their

nature, old maids invariably experience a disquietude in their inner life to which they never become reconciled. Is it not hard, at any age, and especially for a woman, to read an expression of repulsion on peoples' countenances when her part is to awaken none but agreeable feelings in the hearts around her? An old maid, also, never looks directly at any one, not so much by reason of modesty as of timidity and bashfulness. These creatures do not forgive society for their false position, because they do not forgive themselves for it. Now it is impossible for a person perpetually at war with herself, or who lives contrarily to the ordinary mode of life, to leave others in peace or not to envy their happiness. It was only this world of sad ideas which M^{lle} Gamard saw out of her dull grey eyes, and the large dark circles around them indicated a long struggle in her solitary life. The shape of her forehead, her head and her cheeks displayed the characteristics of rigidity and hardness. Without taking any heed she let some hairs that once had a touch of brown in them, grow on her chin. Her thin lips hardly covered her rather long teeth which were not wanting in whiteness. Of dark complexion, her once black hair had through dreadful head-

aches grown quite grey. This misfortune necessitated her wearing a plaited band, but not knowing how to put it on so as to conceal its existence, there were frequently some spaces visible between the edge of her cap and the black cord which tied this rather badly curled half-wig. Her dress, of taffetas silk in summer and merino in winter, but invariably of bright red, was rather tight for her ungraceful figure and thin arms. Always cut low her collar exposed a neck having a reddish skin as artistically marked with lines as an oakleaf seen in the light. Her origin would fully account for the shortcomings of her form. She was the daughter of a wood merchant, a sort of peasant who had risen in the world. At eighteen, she might have been fresh and plump, but no trace now remained of the white skin or the pretty colouring which she boasted to have had at this time. The tint of her skin had assumed that pale hue common enough among devout people. Of all the features of her face her aquiline nose was the one which contributed the most towards expressing the disposition of her ideas, as well as the flat forehead which betrayed the narrowness of her mind. Her movements had an odd suddenness which excluded

all grace, and the sight of her taking out her handkerchief from her little bag to loudly blow her nose would have sufficed for you to understand her character and habits. Of a rather tall figure, she held herself very straight and justified the remark of a naturalist who from a point of view of nature accounted for the gait of old maids by making out that their joints were soldered together. She walked without the motion being distributed evenly about the body, which produces that gracious movement so attractive in women. She moved, so to speak like one piece, while seeming to spring up, at each step, like the statue of the Commandeur (1). When she was in good humour she used to give out, as do all old maids, that she could easily have married, but she found out the insincerity of her lover in time and thus, without knowing it, made her head rule her heart.

This typical form of the species of old spinster made a suitable centre to the grotesque designs on a glazed paper representing some Turkish landscapes which decorated the walls of the dining-room. Mademoiselle Gamard generally stayed in

(1) Taken from Don Juan.

this room which boasted of two console tables and a barometer. A tapestry cushion from which the colour had faded was placed on each of the abbés'seats. The general drawing room where she received was worthy of her. It will soon be known, it must be remarked by the reader, that it was called the yellow drawing room; the drapery was yellow, the furniture and coverings yellow; on the mantel piece was a gilt framed looking glass, also an eye-sore in the shape of some candlesticks and a crystal clock. As to the private part of Mlle Gamard's apartment, no one had been allowed to go in there. One could only imagine that it was full of those old fineries, dilapidated furniture, and sort of rags, which all old maids surround themselves with and are so fond of. Such was the person destined to exercise the greatest influence on the latter days of the Abbé Birotteau.

Being unable to exercise her womanly activities as intended by nature, and finding herself obliged to give vent to them where she was, this old spinster had exerted them in the mean intrigues, provincial gossip, and egotistical schemes such as all old maids eventually devote themselves to entirely. It had been Birotteau's misfortune to rouse

in Sophie Gamard the only sentiments which this poor creature could possibly experience, namely those of hatred : up till then these sentiments had been dormant, owing to the dullness and monotony of a life in a provincial town, of which the horizon was in her view still confined : but now, when applied in small matters and brought into play in a narrow sphere, they were to become all the more intense. Birotteau was one of those men with whom things are fated to go wrong, for not being sufficiently on the look-out they cannot avoid their occurring, and so everything befalls them.

— Yes, after a moment's pause, it will be fine, replied the Canon, who seemed to wake out of his musing and wished to conform to the laws of politeness. Birotteau, alarmed at the time which had passed between his remark and the reply, for he had, for the first time in his life, taken his coffee without talking, left the dining room where his heart was squeezed as in a vice. Feeling his cup of coffee weighing rather heavily upon him, he sadly went for a walk on the little narrow paths, bordered with boxwood, which were laid out in the shape of a star in the garden. But on looking round, after the first turn that he made, he saw Mlle Gamard and the Abbé Troubert standing si-

lently on the threshold of the drawingroom door ; he, with his arms crossed and perfectly still like a statue on a tomb, she, leaning against the Venetian shutter. Both of them seemed, while looking at him, to be counting the number of his steps. Nothing is more disconcerting for a naturally shy individual than to be the object of inquisitive examination : but if it is done with the eyes of hatred, the kind of suffering that it causes is changed into an intolerable martyrdom. In a short while the Abbé Birotteau imagined that he was preventing Mlle Gamard and the Canon from taking a walk. This idea, inspired all at once by fear and good nature took such a hold upon him that it conduced to his quitting the place. He went away thinking no more of his Canonry, so absorbed was he about the old maid's desperate tyranny. He found, by chance, and happily for him, plenty of occupation at Saint Gatien, where there were several funerals, a marriage, and two baptisms. He was able then to forget his troubles : when hunger reminded him that it must be about the dinner hour, he was dismayed on pulling out his watch, to find that it was a few minutes after four o'clock. He knew Mlle Gamard's punctuality and therefore hurried to her house.

He saw in the kitchen that the first dish had

abready been cleared away. Then, on entering the dining room, the old maid said to him in a rasping tone of voice which conveyed both a sharp reproach and exultation at finding her boarder in the wrong.

— It is half past four, Monsieur Birotteau, you know that we dont wait for you.

The curate glanced at the dining room clock and perceived from the appearance of its gauze covering, which was intended to keep off the dust, that his hostess had wound it up during the morning and given herself the pleasure of setting it faster than the clock at Saint Gatien. There was nothing to be said. For the curate to have ventured upon a remark as to his surmise would only have caused one of the most terrible and clearly substantiated of those eloquent explosions that M^{lle} Gamard knew how, like all women of her class, to let burst forth on such occasions. The thousand and one annoyances that a servant can make his master submit to, or a wife her husband, in the domestic affairs of life, were thoroughly understood by M^{lle} Gamard who overwhelmed her boarder with them. The way in which she took pleasure in weaving her plots against the poor priest's domestic happiness bore the stamp of a most profoundly malicious

genius. She arranged so that she would never appear to be in the wrong.

A week after the time to which the beginning of this story relates, residence in this house, and the relations that the Abbé Birotteau had with M^{lle} Gamard, revealed to him a plot that had been conceived during the past six months. As long as the old maid had exercised her vengeance quietly, and the curate, refusing to believe in any evilly disposed intentions, had been labouring under a misconception, the moral harm had made little progress with him. But after the affair of the candlestick taken upstairs, and the alteration of the clock, Birotteau could no longer doubt that he was living under the rule of a hatred which kept an eye fixed inexorably upon him. From that moment, perceiving M^{lle} Gamard's lean and crooked fingers ever ready to bury themselves in his heart, he quickly gave way to despair.

Happy to live with a sentiment as fertile in emotions as that of vengeance, the old damsel amused herself by hovering and poisoning over the curate as a bird of prey hovers and poises over a field-mouse before devouring it. Some time ago she hit upon a plan which the astonished

priest would never have guessed and which she soon set about putting in operation, thus showing the genius that solitary individuals know how to display in small matters, that is individuals whose souls are incapable of feeling the grandeur of real piety, and who have rushed into the minutiae of devotion. Last, but frightful aggravation of Birotteau's troubles ! The nature of his grief precluded him, an open-hearted man liking to be pitied and consoled, from enjoying the small pleasure of telling his friends about them. The small amount of tact that he owed to his shyness made him fear to appear ridiculous in paying attention to such trifles. Yet these trifles made up the whole of his existence, his dear existence full of occupation about nothing and of nothings in occupation ; a dull and gloomy life, in which very strong feelings were misfortunes, and the absence of all emotion was happiness. The paradise of the poor priest was therefore changed into a hell. At last, his sufferings became unbearable. The fear which the outlook of an explanation with M^{lle} Gamard gave him, grew from day to day, and the secret misfortune which was tainting his declining years impaired his health.

One morning, on putting on his blue silk stockings, he noticed a diminution of two thirds of an inch round his calf. Astounded at this diagnostic so cruelly irrefutable, he resolved to approach the Abbé Troubert and ask him to intercede officially between M^{lle} Gamard and him. In the presence of the imposing looking Canon, who, in order to receive him in an empty room, at once left a study full of papers where he used to work and no one entered, the curate was almost ashamed to speak about M^{lle} Gamard's annoyances to a man who seemed to him so earnestly occupied. But having undergone all the anxiety of these inward resolutions that unassuming, irresolute, or weak people feel even for things of little importance, he decided, not without considerable heart throbbings, to explain his position to the Abbé Troubert.

The Canon listened with a grave and cold demeanour, trying, but in vain, to subdue certain smiles which, perhaps, would have revealed to intelligent eyes a feeling of secret pleasure. A light seemed to flash from his eyes when Biroteau depicted to him with the eloquence of true feeling, the constant bitterness with which he was impregnated. But Troubert with a gesture

much affected by people given to deep thinking, put his hand above his eyes, and maintained his usual attitude.

When the curate had finished speaking he would have been much at a loss had he wished to read in Troubert's face, tinged here and there with a few spots of a deeper yellow than his bilious colouring usually had, any traces of the feelings that he should have aroused in this mysterious priest. After having remained silent for a moment, the Canon made one of those replies of which every word should be carefully weighed in order to fully grasp the meaning but which, later on, proved to thoughtful people the astounding depth of his intellect and the strength of his mind. At last he crushed Birotteau by saying to him : « These things astonished him all the more, as he would never have noticed them had not his brother priest mentioned them ; he attributed this want of discernment to his important occupations, his work, and to the tyranny of certain lofty thoughts which did not permit of his taking note of the details of life. » He observed, without having the air of wishing to censure the conduct of a man whose age and knowledge deserved his respect, that. « Formerly,

recluses thought rarely about their food or their shelter in the recesses of deep solitude where they gave themselves up to sacred meditation and that : « Now-a-days a priest could in mind become a recluse anywhere ». Then, turning to Birotteau he added that « these discussions were altogether foreign to him. For twelve years, nothing similar had taken place between M^{lle} Gamard and the venerable Abbé Chapeloud. As for himself, without doubt, he could well, he added, become the arbitrator between the curate and their hostess, because his friendship for her did not go beyond the limits imposed by the laws of the Church upon its faithful servants ; but then justice demanded that he should also hear Mademoiselle Gamard. That, besides, he did not perceive any change in her, that he had always known her as she is, that he had willingly submitted to some of her whims, knowing that this respected lady was kindness, gentleness itself ; that the little changes in her temper must be attributable to a lung affection of which she never used to speak, and to which she was resigned like a true Christian. He wound up by saying to the curate that : « If only he were to remain a few more years with Mademoiselle, he

would know better how to appreciate her and recognise the treasures of her excellent character. »

The Abbé Birotteau went out quite non-plussed. Not being in a position in which he could consult anyone else about this matter, he judged Mademoiselle Gamard from his own point of view. The good man thought that by going away for a few days, and no fresh fuel being added to the flame, it would put an end to the hatred that this maid bore him. He therefore resolved to spend a few days, as he had done before, in a country house where Madame de Listomère went at the end of the Autumn, a time of year when the climate is generally fine and mild in Touraine. Poor man ! he exactly fulfilled the secret wishes of his terrible enemy, whose projects only the patience of a monk could baffle ; but foreseeing nothing, and not knowing his own business, he had to succumb like a lamb under the first blow from the butcher.

Lying on the rising ground between the town of Tours and the heights of St Georges, having a southern aspect and surrounded by rocks, Madame de Listomère's house provided the

charms of the country and all the pleasures of the town. In fact it only took ten minutes to come from the bridge at Tours to the gateway of this house, called l'Alouette, a great boon in a part of the country where no one wishes to put himself out for anything at all, even to go in search of pleasure. The Abbé Birotteau had been at l'Alouette for about ten days, when one morning, during lunch, the *Concierge* came to tell him that Monsieur Caron wished to speak to him. Monsieur Caron was a lawyer entrusted with M^{lle} Gamard's business affairs. Birotteau, not remembering and not knowing any point of contention to be settled with anyone whatever in the world, left the table a prey to a certain amount of anxiety, in order to see the lawyer: he found him sitting unpretentiously on the balustrade of a terrace.

« The intention of your no longer living at Mademoiselle Gamard's having become evident », said the business man.

« Eh, Monsieur », exclaimed the Abbé Birotteau interrupting, « I never thought of leaving her ».

« However, Monsieur », resumed the lawyer, it is necessary that you should come to an understanding with Mademoiselle in this respect, as she

has now sent me to know if you are going to stay for long in the country. The case of a long absence not having been contemplated in your agreement might give cause for dispute. But Mademoiselle Gamard understanding that your board... »

« Monsieur », said Birotteau surprised and again interrupting the lawyer, « I did not think that it would be necessary to employ almost legal means for... »

« Mademoiselle Gamard, who wishes to anticipate all difficulty, has sent me to arrange matters with you... »

« Well if you will be good enough to come back tomorrow », resumed the Abbé, « I shall have taken advice on my behalf. »

« Very well », said Caron, and wished him good morning.

And the scrivener went away.

The poor curate, terrified at the persistence with which Mademoiselle Gamard was pursuing him, went back to Madame de Listomère's dining-room with a worried look on his face. On seeing him everyone said; « What has happened to you, Monsieur Birotteau ? »

The Abbé, quite upset, sat down without answering, completely overcome by the vague

indications of his misfortune. But after lunch when several of his friends were assembled in the dining-room before a good fire, Birotteau told them fully the particulars of his adventure. His listeners, who were beginning to get bored with their visit to the country, took a lively interest in this intrigue, so much in keeping with the life in the provinces. Every one of them took the Abbé's side against the old maid.

« How is it », said Madame de Listomère, « you don't see that the Abbé Troubert wants your rooms? »

Here the writer might well sketch the portrait of this lady; but he has thought that even those to whom Sterne's system of *cognomology* is not known, would not pronounce these three words, MADAME DE LISTOMÈRE, without depicting her as noble, dignified, tempering the rigours of piety with the old-style elegance of the classical customs of the Monarchy, and with polite manners; good-natured but a trifle stiff, speaking with a slightly nasal twang: a reader of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, of comedy, and still doing up her hair « en cheveux ».

« The Abbé Birotteau must not give in to this cantankerous old thing », exclaimed Monsieur

de Listomère, a Naval lieutenant then on leave at his aunt's. If the curate has some pluck and will follow my advice, he will soon be left alone. »

Finally each began to analyse Mademoiselle Gamard's actions with the penetration peculiar to the people of the provinces, to whom one cannot deny the faculty of knowing how to expose the most secret of human actions.

« That is n't it », said an old landed proprietor who knew the country. « There is something serious under the surface which I have not grasped yet. The Abbé Troubert is too deep to be read so easily. Our dear Birotteau is only at the beginning of his troubles.

First of all, will he be happy and left quiet, even if he should give up his rooms to Troubert? I doubt it. If Caron came to tell you, » he added while turning towards the astonished priest, « that you intended to leave Mademoiselle Gamard, undoubtedly Mademoiselle Gamard intends to get you out of her house... Well, willing or unwilling, you'll go out of it. These sort of people never risk anything, and only play for a certainty. »

In this old gentleman, called Monsieur de Bourbonne, were manifested all the ideas of the pro-

vinces as adequately as Voltaire epitomised the manners of his time. In regard to matters of dress this gruff, thin old man evinced all the indifference of a proprietor whose landed valuation is known in the district. His face, tanned by the Touraine sun, was less intelligent than refined. Accustomed to weigh his words and combine his actions therewith, his great power of discernment was hidden under a misleading simplicity. Besides, the merest glance would suffice to see that, like a Normandy peasant, he invariably got the advantage in all matters of business. He was well up in the art of making wine, the favorite science of the *Tourangeaux*. He had managed to take in some reclaimed land alongside of the Loire, and so increase one of the meadows of his property, without incurring a lawsuit with the government. This trick gave him the reputation of being a clever man. If, charmed by Monsieur de Bourbonne's conversation you had inquired of any Tourangeau about his history; « Oh, he's a sly old fellow » would have been the usual reply of all who were jealous of him, and there were many. In Touraine, as in the greater part of the provinces, jealousy *forms the foundation of the language*.

Monsieur de Bourbonne's remark caused a

momentary silence, during which the persons composing this party appeared to be thinking. In the midst of all this Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix was announced. Wishing to be useful to Birotteau, she came from Tours, and the news which she brought completely changed the aspect of affairs. When she came, everyone, except the landowner, was advising Birotteau to declare war against Troubert and Gamard, under the auspices of the aristocratic society which would protect him.

« The Vicar General, to whom the work of the Staff is entrusted », said Mademoiselle Salomon, « has just fallen ill, and the Archbishop has put the Abbé Troubert in his place. Now the appointment to the Canonry therefore will depend entirely upon him. But, yesterday, at Mademoiselle de La Blottière's, the Abbé Poirel was talking of the unpleasantnesses that the Abbé Birotteau was causing to Mademoiselle Gamard, so as to wish to justify the disfavour in which our good Abbé will be placed : the Abbé Birotteau is a man to whom the Abbé Chapeloud was very necessary, he said, and since the death of this virtuous Canon it has been proved that... Suppositions and calumnies followed,... You understand? »

« Troubert will be Vicar General », said Monsieur de Bourbonne solemnly.

« Let's see », exclaimed Madame de Listomère while looking at Birotteau, « Which do you prefer, to be Canon, or remain on at Mademoiselle Gamard's? »

« To be Canon », was the general cry.

« Well », continued Madame de Listomère, it is necessary to give some benefit to the Abbé Troubert and Mademoiselle Gamard. Do not they let you know indirectly, by Caron's visit, that if you agree to leave them, you will be Canon? Give and take. »

Each was loud in his admiration of the acuteness and sagacity of Madame de Listomère, except the Baron de Listomère, her nephew, who said to Monsieur de Bourbonne in a comical tone of voice « I should have liked to see the fight between the Gamard and the Birotteau. »

But, unfortunately for the curate, the forces were not equal between the society people and the old maid supported by the Abbé Troubert. The time soon arrived when this quarrel had to become more public, increase, and assume enormous proportions. On the advice of Madame de Listomère, and the majority of her adherents who

were beginning to take much interest in this intrigue which was thrust into the emptiness of their provincial life, a valet was sent to Monsieur Caron. The man of business came back with remarkable rapidity, Monsieur de Bourbonne being the only one who was at all uneasy about the matter.

« Let us put off all decision for further investigation », was the advice of this Fabius, still in his dressing-gown, who well knew how to place his pieces on the Tourangeau chess-board.

He wanted to enlighten Birotteau as to the dangers of his position. The cunning old man's prudence did not suit the excitement of the moment, and but little attention was paid to him.

The conference between the lawyer and Birotteau lasted a very short time. The curate came in with a scared look, saying, « He wants me to give a written agreement to my withdrawal ».

« What is this frightful word? » said the Naval officer.

« What does it mean? » exclaimed Madame de Listomère.

« It means simply that the Abbé will have to declare his readiness to leave Mademoiselle Ga-

mard's house », replied Monsieur de Bourbonne while taking a pinch of snuff.

« Is it only that? then sign », said Madame de Listomère, while looking at Birotteau. « If you have really decided upon leaving her, there is nothing to be lost in putting down your wishes ».

Birotteau's wishes!

« That's quite right », said Monsieur de Bourbonne, while shutting up his snuff-box with a snap, the meaning of which cannot be conveyed here since it is peculiarly expressive. « But it is always dangerous to commit oneself to writing », added he while putting his snuff-box on the mantel-piece in a way that might alarm the curate.

Birotteau was so taken aback by this upsetting of all his ideas, by the suddenness of events which took him unawares, by the light way in which his friends treated the most precious matters of his solitary life, that he remained motionless, as if lost in the clouds, thinking of nothing, but listening and trying to get at the sense of the flow of words being poured forth by everyone. He took Monsieur Caron's document and read it, as if to study the lawyer's wording; but his action was merely mechanical. And he signed this document, by which he acknowledged voluntarily to

give up living at Mademoiselle Gamard's, when it had been agreed to between them that he should be boarded there. When the curate had affixed his signature, Mister Caron took up the agreement and asked where his client should send the things that belonged to him. Birotteau designated Madame de Listomère's house. This lady indicated by a nod her readiness to receive the abbé for a few days, having no doubt as to his shortly being made Canon. The old gentleman asked to look at this particular agreement of renunciation, and Monsieur Caron brought it to him.

« Well » said he to the curate after having perused it, « then there are some written conditions between you and Mademoiselle Gamard? Where are they? What are these stipulations? »

« The agreement is at my apartment », Birotteau answered.

« Do you know the purport of it? » the old gentleman asked of the lawyer.

« No, Monsieur », said Monsieur Caron while reaching out to take up the fatal paper.

« Ah, » said the old gentleman to himself, « you *Monsieur l'Avocat*, undoubtedly you know everything that is set forth in this agreement; but you are not paid to tell us. »

And Monsieur de Bourbonne returned the renunciation to the lawyer.

« Where am I going to put all my furniture », cried Birotteau, and my books, my beautiful book-case, my fine pictures, my red drawing-room furniture, in fact all my furniture. »

And the despair of the poor man, who looked upon himself as uprooted, so to speak, was truly pitiable; he showed so clearly the simplicity of his habits, his ignorance of worldly affairs, that Madame de Listomère and Mademoiselle Salomon said by way of consoling him while assuming the tone adopted by mothers when they promise a toy to their children. « Don't upset yourself about such trifles. We will find you a house less cold, less dismal than Mademoiselle Gamard's. If no place turns up that you like, well, one of us will take you as a boarder. Let us go and have a game of backgammon. Tomorrow you can go and see Monsieur l'Abbé Troubert, and you will see how well you will be received by him. »

Weak people are as easily reassured as they are frightened. The poor Birotteau therefore, dazzled at the perspective of living at Madame de Listomère's, forgot his ruin, irretrievably accom-

plished, and the happiness he had for so long wished and had enjoyed with such delight. But that evening, before going to sleep, and with the tribulation of a man for whom the flurry of moving house and of new associations meant the end of the world, he racked his brain thinking as to where he could find a place so suitable for his library as the landing in his apartment. While picturing his books disarranged, his furniture scattered, and his household in disorder, he asked himself a thousand times why the first year passed at Mademoiselle Gamard's had been so pleasant and the second so cruel. And each time he ended by coming to no conclusion in the matter. The Canonry no longer seemed to him to offer a sufficient compensation for so many misfortunes; and he compared his life to a stocking in which a single stitch dropped rips the whole. Mademoiselle Salomon remained to him. But in losing his old delusions of the imagination, the old priest no longer dared to trust to a new friendship.

In the *Città dolente* of old maids, many are met with, especially in France, whose life is a sacrifice nobly offered every day to noble sentiments. Some remain proudly faithful to a heart which death has taken from them too soon : mar-

tyrs to love, they find out the secret of being wives in spirit. Others are obedient to family pride, which to our shame is daily waning, and devote themselves to the fortune of a brother or to orphan nephews: these become mothers in remaining maidens. These old maids attain to the highest heroism of their sex, while devoting all their feminine sentiments to the creed of misfortune. They idealise the face of a wife while renouncing the compensations of her destiny, and only accepting the troubles. They live then surrounded by the splendour of their devotion, and men bow respectfully to their faded features.

Mademoiselle de Sombreuil was neither wife nor maiden: she was and always will be a living poem. Mademoiselle Salomon was one of these devoted individuals. Her devotion was religiously sublime, seeing that it was without glory, after having been a continual sufferer. Beautiful and young, she was loved and she loved: her intended lost his reason. For five years she had, with the courage of love, devoted herself towards making this unfortunate man truly happy, and was so thoroughly infatuated with him that she did not believe he was at all deranged. She was, all the same, a person, of simple manners, natural in her conversa-

tion, and whose pale face displayed considerable character in spite of the regularity of her features. She never spoke about any of the events of her life. Only, at times, the sudden starts she used to give on hearing the account of some frightful or sad incident, revealed those fine qualities which great sorrows develop. She had come to live in Tours after having lost the companion of her life. There she was not appreciated at her true value, and passed as a *good sort*. She did a great deal of good, and for choice took up with simple minded people. For this reason she naturally was deeply interested in the poor curate.

Mademoiselle de Villenoix, who was going to the town that morning, took Birotteau with her, put him down in front of the cathedral, and left him wending his way towards the cloister, where he was anxious to go in order to at least save the Canonry from the shipwreck, as well as to watch the removal of his furniture. He experienced violent palpitations of the heart when he rang at the door of this house to which he had been accustomed to come during the past fourteen years, in which he had lived, and from which he was obliged to exile himself for ever,

after having dreamed of dying there in peace, following the example of his friend Chapeloud. Marianne was surprised to see the curate. He told her that he had come to speak to the Abbé Troubert, and went towards the ground floor apartment where the Canon lived; but Marianne cried out to him.

« The Abbé Troubert is no longer there, Monsieur le Vicaire, he is in your old rooms. »

These words caused a terribly violent shock to the curate, who at last understood Troubert's character and the depth of a vengeance so carefully calculated, in finding him settled in Chapeloud's library, seated in Chapeloud's fine Gothic arm-chair, sleeping no doubt on Chapeloud's bed, using Chapeloud's furniture, and at last disinheriting this Chapeloud's friend, who, for such a long time had put up at Mademoiselle Gamard's, in preventing him from obtaining any advancement and in closing the salons of Tours against him. By what stroke of magic wand had this transformation taken place? Did all these things no longer belong to Birotteau? Certainly, on seeing the sardonic look with which Troubert contemplated this library, poor Birotteau fancied that the future Vicar General was sure to possess

for ever the spoils of those whom he had so cruelly hated, Chapeloud as an enemy, and Birotteau because in him Chapeloud was reiterated. With this aspect in view, a thousand ideas arose in the good man's breast, and plunged him into a sort of dream. He remained motionless, and almost fascinated by Troubert's eye, which was gazing at him steadily. « I do not suppose Monsieur », said Birotteau at last, « that you may wish to deprive me of the things that are mine. If Mademoiselle Gamard has been in such a hurry to give you better rooms, she ought, nevertheless, to have been sufficiently reasonable as to allow me time to get my books together and to remove my furniture. »

« Monsieur », said the Abbé Troubert coldly, whilst allowing no sign of emotion to appear on his countenance, « Mademoiselle Gamard told me yesterday about your going away, the cause thereof being still unknown to me. If she has put me in to these rooms it was of necessity. Monsieur l'Abbé Poirel has taken my apartment. I don't know if the things in these rooms belong or no to Mademoiselle, but if they are yours you know her trustworthiness : the sanctity of her life is a guarantee as to her honesty.

As to myself, you do not know how simple my habits are. For fifteen years I have slept in a bare room without paying attention to the damp which in the long run has killed me. However, if you should wish to live in these rooms again, I will give them up to you with pleasure. » On hearing these portentous words, Birotteau forgott what he wanted to say about the Canonry, wen down with the alacrity of a young man to look for Mademoiselle Gamard, and met her at the bottom of the stairs on the wide landing which united the two portions of the dwelling.

« Mademoiselle », said he, bowing to her and without paying attention to the bitter mocking smile on her lips or to the extraordinary flame which made her eyes glare like a tiger's, « I do not understand why you have not waited until I had taken away my furniture, for... »

« What », said she to him, interrupting, « Have not your things been sent to Madame de Listomère's ? »

« But my furniture ? »

« Then you have n't read your agreement », said the old maid in a tone which ought to be written in music to be understood how hatred

can put variations in the accentuation of each word.

And Mademoiselle Gamard seemed to grow taller, her eyes shone more, her countenance became lighter, and her whole person trilled with delight. The Abbé Troubert opened a window so as to see more clearly in the folio volume he was consulting. Birotteau remained as if struck by a thunderbolt. With a voice as loud as a trumpet, Mademoiselle Gamard shouted the following sentences into his ears. « Was it not agreed, in the event of your leaving me, that your furniture would belong to me as compensation for the difference in the rate of your board and that of the respected Abbé Chapeloud? Now Monsieur l'Abbé Poirel having been appointed Canon... »

On hearing these last words Birotteau bowed slightly as if to take leave of the old maid; then hastily left. He was afraid, if he had remained longer, of fainting and thus affording a still greater triumph to such implacable enemies. Walking like a drunken man he reached Madame de Listomère's house, where, in a low room, he found a trunk containing his linen, clothes, and papers. At the sight of these the sole rem-

nants of his possessions, the unfortunate priest sat down and hid his face in his hands so that no one should see his tears. The Abbé Poirel was a Canon. He, Birotteau, saw himself without refuge, without private means, and without furniture. Luckily Mademoiselle Salomon had just passed in her carriage. The *concierge* of the house, who saw the state of despair the poor man was in, made a sign to the coachman. Then after exchange of a few words between this old maid and the *concierge*, the curate consented to come to his faithful friend to whom he could only make a few incoherent remarks. Mademoiselle Salomon alarmed at the momentary derangement of faculties already so weak, took him at once to l'Alouette, attributing this commencement of mental derangement to the effect that the Abbé Poirel's appointment had made upon him. She did not know about the agreement made between the priest and Mademoiselle Garmard, for the very good reason that he was not aware as to the extent of its terms himself. And as it is in nature that comedy sometimes forms a part of the most pathetic things, Birotteau's strange replies almost made Mademoiselle Salomon smile.

« Chapeloud was right » he said, « He is a fiend. »

« Who ? » she asked ;

« Chapeloud, he has taken everything from me. »

« Poirel then ? »

« No, Troubert. »

At last they reached l'Alouette, where the priest's friends lavished such special attentions upon him that towards the evening they had calmed him and were able to obtain an account of what had taken place during the morning.

The phlegmatic old gentleman naturally asked to see the agreement, which, since the evening before, had seemed to him to contain such a riddle. Birotteau drew the fatal official sheet of paper from his pocket, and handed it to Monsieur de Bourbonne, who rapidly reading soon came to the following clause :

As there is a difference of eight hundred francs a year between the sum paid by the late Abbé Chapeloud for board, and that for which the said Sophie Gamard agrees to receive into her house, according to the conditons stipulated above, the said François Birotteau : whereas the undersigned François Birotteau acknowledges superabundantly to be unable to

give for several years the price paid by Mademoiselle Gamard's boarders, and particularly by the Abbé Troubert ; finally, in consideration of various advances made by the said undersigned Sophie Gamard, the said Birotteau undertakes to leave to her as indemnity the furniture of which he will be the possessor at his decease or when, for any reason whatever, he should of his own will leave, and at whatever period, the premises let to him with immediate possession, and not to further benefit by the privileges made by Mademoiselle Gamard towards him, above...

« Well ; I never ! What a contract », exclaimed the old gentleman, « and what claws the said Sophie Gamard has ! »

Poor Birotteau, not imagining in his simple brain any cause which might part him for a day from Mademoiselle Gamard, counted upon dying at her house. He had no recollection of this clause of which the terms had not even been discussed formerly, she had appeared to him to be so just, when anxious to form one of the old maid's household, he had signed all the parchments that were put before him. This innocence was so worthy of respect, and Mademoiselle Gamard's conduct so atrocious : the lot of this poor sexa-

genarian had something so deplorable in it, and his weak nature made it so touching, that in the first fit of indignation Madame de Listomère exclaimed ; « I am the cause of the signing of this deed which has ruined you, I ought to restore to you the happiness of which I have deprived you. »

« But », said the old gentleman, « the deed constitutes a fraud, and there is matter for a lawsuit. »

« Well, Birotteau will go to law. If he loses in Tours, he will win in Orleans. If he loses in Orleans he will win in Paris », exclaimed the Baron de Listomère.

« If he wishes to go to law », resumed Monsieur de Bourbonne coldly, « I advise him to give up the curacy first. »

« We will consult some lawyers », Madame de Listomère went on, « and go to law if necessary. But this business is too shameful on Mademoiselle Gamard's part, and may become so harmful to the Abbé Troubert that we cannot fail to get some compensation. »

After full consideration, each promised his assistance to the Abbé Birotteau in the contest about to be engaged in between him and all the

adherents of his antagonists. An unerring presentiment, an indefinable provincial instinct forced each to link together the two names of Gamard and Troubert. But not one of those then at Madame de Listomere's, except the cunning old man, had a true idea as to the significance of such a contest. Monsieur de Bourbonne drew the poor abbé into a corner.

« Of the fourteen persons here », he said to him in a low voice, « there will not be one of them for you in a fortnight's time. If you should have need to call anyone to help you then, you will perhaps find me the only one bold enough to dare take up your defence, because I know the provinces, the men, the things, and better still the interests. But all your friends, though full of good intentions, are putting you on a bad road which you will not be able to get off. Listen to my advice. If you wish to live in peace, leave the Curacy of Saint Gatien, leave Tours. Don't say where you are going, but go and look for some living far away where Troubert will not be able to come across you. »

« Leave Tours ! », exclaimed the curate with indescribable dismay.

For him it was a sort of death. Was not this

sundering all the roots with which he had planted himself in the world? Bachelors let habits take the place of sentiments. When to this moral system, which tends to their going through life rather than living it, a weak character is added, outward things take an astonishing hold upon them. Besides, Birotteau had become like to some vegetable : to transplant it would be to jeopardise its fertilization. Just as, in order to live, a tree must at all times have the same juices, and always have its roots in the same earth, Birotteau should always trot into Saint Gatien, always stamp along in the vicinity of the Mail where he regularly took his walk, always go along the streets through which he had been accustomed to pass, and continue to frequent the three drawing-rooms where he used to play whist or backgammon every evening.

« Ah, I did not think about that », replied Monsieur de Bourbonne, while looking at the priest with a sort of pity.

Everyone in the town of Tours soon knew that *Madame la Baronne de Listomère* widow of a Lieutenant Général, had taken the Abbé Birotteau, Curate of St Gatien, into her house. This fact, which many called in question, clearly decided all points of doubt and showed up the parties,

especially when Mademoiselle Salomon, the first to do so, dared to speak of fraud and a lawsuit. With that insinuating vanity which distinguishes old maids, and the fanaticism of personality which characterises them, Mademoiselle Gamard was very much offended at the part taken by Madame de Listomère. The Baroness was a woman of high rank, always in the fashion, and whose good taste, refined manners, and piety could not be disputed. In receiving Birotteau she gave the most formal denial to all Mademoiselle Gamard's assertions, while indirectly censuring her conduct, and appeared to countenance the curate's complaints against his late hostess.

In order to understand this story it is necessary to explain here regarding the discernment and spirit of analysis, with which old maids get an idea as to the doings of others, which lent force to Mademoiselle Gamard, and as to what were the resources of her side. Accompanied by the silent Abbé Troubert, she used to pass her evenings in four or five houses where a dozen people met, all intimate friends, having the same tastes and similar positions in life. There were one or two old men who adopted the notions and prattling ways of their servants; five or six

old maids who passed the whole of their day in sifting the sayings and scrutinizing the doings of their neighbours and of people in a lower grade of society than themselves : then, lastly, several elderly women exclusively occupied in diffusing gossip, in keeping a register of every income, or in controlling the doings of others ; they prognosticated the marriages and blamed the conduct of their friends as severely as that of their enemies. These people, all housed in the town in a way that might be represented by the capillary vessels of a plant, sucked up the news and the secrets of each household with the thirst of a leaf for the dew, pumped them up and transmitted them mechanically to the Abbé Troubert, as leaves impart the freshness that they have absorbed to the trunk. Then every evening of the week, stimulated by this need for sensation which is met with in all individuals, these good devout people drew up an exact balance sheet of the situation in the town with a sagacity worthy of the Council of Ten, and acted as the armed police force of this sort of spying without risk, which passions create. Then, when they had found out the secret reason of some event, their pride conduced to their adapting themselves to the propriety

of their *Sanhedrin*, in order to give a gossiping tone in their respective zones. This useless yet busy congregation, unseen yet seeing everything, silent yet talking incessantly, then possessed an influence which its insignificance apparently rendered of little harm, but which, nevertheless, became terrible when animated by some greater interest. But it was a long time since an event so serious, and so generally important for each of them as the Birotteau contest, supported by Madame de Listomère, against the Abbé Troubert and Mademoiselle Gamard, had presented itself in the sphere of their existences. In fact the three *salons* of Mesdames de Listomère, Merlin de la Blotière, and Villenoix, being looked upon as hostile by those frequented by Mademoiselle Gamard, *esprit de corps* and all its vanities was at the bottom of this quarrel. It was like a fight between the Roman people and the Senate in a molehill, or a storm in a tea-cup, as Montesquieu said when speaking of the Republic of San Marino, where the official positions lasted for a day only, so easy was it to seize upon the power. But this tempest, nevertheless, developed as many passions in the souls as it would have needed to direct the greatest social interest. Is it not a mistake to

think that time only passes quickly for those who are a prey to the events that create a stir and movement in life? With the Abbé Troubert the hours slipped by in as animated a manner, flew along filled with thoughts quite as anxious, were fraught with despair and hope as fathomless as the merciless hours of a really ambitious man, of a gambler, and of a lover. God alone knows the secret of the energy which triumphs gained mysteriously over men, things, and ourselves cost us. If we do not always know where we are going, we certainly know the fatigues of the journey. But if the historian is permitted to turn aside for a moment from the drama he is relating, to assume the rôle of critic, if he invites you to cast a glance upon the existences of these old maids and of the two abbés, in order to look for the cause of the evil which vitiates them in their nature, it will perhaps be shown to you that it is necessary for man to experience certain passions in order to develop in himself those qualities which give nobleness to his life, in widening the sphere and stifling the egotism natural to all creatures.

Madame de Listomère had come back to Tours without knowing that for the past five or six days several of her friends had been obliged to refute

an allegation made against her, which she would have laughed at had she known of it, hinting at her affection for her nephew for almost criminal reasons. She took the Abbé Birotteau to her lawyer to whom the case did not appear at all favorable.

The curate's friends, animated by the sentiments that justice gives to a good cause, or indifferent towards a case which was not their own personal affair, had postponed the commencement of the suit until the time of their return to Tours. Mademoiselle Gamard's friends were therefore able to be beforehand, and managed to put a light upon the matter unfavorable to the Abbé. Then the lawyer, whose clientèle consisted exclusively of the pious people of the town, much astonished Madame de Listomère in advising her not to take up such a case, and finished up by saying; « That, for the matter of that, he would not undertake it, because by the terms of the agreement, Mademoiselle Gamard was legally right; that in fairness, that is to say, outside of a Court of Law, the Abbé Birotteau would appear, in the eyes of the court and of honest people, to be wanting in that peaceful and conciliatory nature, and docility, that he had been given credit for up till now; that Mademoiselle Gamard, known as a kind and easy per-

son to live with, had obliged Birotteau in lending him the money necessary to pay the succession duties which Chapeloud's will had led to, without asking for a receipt from him: that Birotteau was not of an age or nature to sign an agreement without knowing what it contained, nor without understanding its meaning: and that if he had left Mademoiselle Gamard after a stay of two years, when his friend Chapeloud had remained twelve years with her, and Troubert fifteen, it would only be with some project in view that was known to him; that the case would therefore be judged as an act of ingratitude, etcetera... » After having let Birotteau go in front towards the staircase, the solicitor took Madame de Listomère aside, while conducting her to the door, and pressed her for the sake of her peace of mind not to mix herself up in this affair.

That evening, however, just as the assemblage was gathering in front of the fireplace at Madame de Listomère's before making up the sets for cards, the poor curate, who was in as great torment as a felon condemned to death would be in a cell at Bicêtre when awaiting the result of his appeal to the Supreme Court, could not refrain from letting his friends know the result of his visit.

« Except the solicitor to the Liberal party, I know of no pettifogging lawyer in Tours who would undertake this case without intending to let it be lost, » exclaimed Monsieur de Bourbonne, « and I don't advise you to embark upon it ».

« Well it's infamous », said the Naval officer. « I will take the abbé to this solicitor. »

« Go there after nightfall », said Monsieur de Bourbonne interrupting him.

« And why ? »

« I have just heard that the Abbé Troubert has been appointed Vicar General in the place of the one who died the day before yesterday. »

« I don't care a straw for the Abbé Troubert. »

Unfortunately the Baron de Listomère, a man of thirty-six years of age, did not notice the sign that Monsieur de Bourbonne made to caution him about what he was saying, and to indicate the presence of a *Conseiller de Préfecture*, a friend of Troubert's. The Naval officer therefore added : « If Monsieur l'Abbé Troubert is a rascal... »

« Oh », said Monsieur de Bourbonne interrupting, « why put the Abbé Troubert into an affair to which he is a complete stranger ? »

« But », went on the Baron, « is n't he making use of the Abbé Birotteau's furniture ? I remember

having gone to Chapeloud's and seen two valuable pictures there. Supposing that they are worth ten thousand francs ?... Do you suppose that Monsieur Birotteau had the intention, for living two years at this Gamard's, to give ten thousand francs when the book-case and the furniture were already worth about this sum ? »

The Abbé Birotteau opened his eyes wide on learning that he had been the possessor of such an enormous capital.

And the Baron, going on excitedly, added. « *Pardieu*, Monsieur Salmon, the late expert at the Musée de Paris, has come to see his mother-in-law here. I shall go there this evening with the Abbé Birotteau, and ask him to value these pictures. From there I shall take him on to the solicitor's. »

Two days after this conversation, the case had taken shape. The solicitor to the Liberal party, who had become Birotteau's, threw cold water upon the curate's cause. The people in opposition to the government, and those who were known not to care for priests or religion, two things which many people confuse, got hold of this affair and it became the talk of the town. The late expert at the Musée had valued the Vir-

gin by Valentin and the Christ by Lebrun, two pieces of great beauty, at eleven thousand francs. As to the bookshelf, and the Gothic style furniture, the prevailing taste for these sort of things which was daily increasing in Paris gave them then a value of twelve thousand francs. In short, the expert, after his examination, estimated the entire furniture at ten thousand écus (1). Now it was evident that Birotteau not having meant to give Mademoiselle Gamard this very large sum for the small amount of money that he would owe her in pursuance of the balance stipulated, there was, judicially speaking, cause to amend their agreement; otherwise the old maid would have been guilty of wilful fraud. The solicitor to the Liberal party therefore commenced the affair by serving a writ on Mademoiselle Gamard. Although a very severe measure, this document, strengthened by a few quotations from supreme courts and corroborated by some articles of the code, was none the less a masterpiece of judicial logic, and so plainly condemned the old maid, that thirty or forty copies of it were maliciously distributed in the town by the opposition.

(1) Six francs pièce.

Some days after the commencement of the strife between the old maid and Birotteau, the Baron de Listomère, who was hoping to be included as *Capitaine de Corvette* in the first list of promotions, intimated some little time back at the Admiralty, received a letter from one of his friends informing him that there was a question then under consideration of putting him on half pay. Very much surprised at this news, he left immediately for Paris, and went to the first soirée given by the Minister, who seemed much astonished himself, and began to laugh on hearing the fears which the Baron de Listomère told him about.

Next day, notwithstanding the Minister's word, the Baron went to make inquiries at the office. Through an indiscretion that certain principals commit pretty frequently for their friends, a secretary showed him a report all prepared but which the illness of a director had prevented from being submitted to the Minister before, and which confirmed the fatal news. The Baron de Listomère went immediately to one of his uncles, a Deputy who could see the Minister at once in the *Chambre*, and begged him to find out His Excellency's intentions, for it was a question of

the ruin of his future. So he waited with the greatest anxiety in his uncle's carriage for the end of the sitting. The Deputy left some time before the end, and on the way back to his house said to his nephew: « Why the devil do you go mixing yourself up and making war with priests? The Minister began by telling me that you had put yourself at the head of the Liberals at Tours. That you hold abominable opinions; and do not know the line of the government, etcetera. His sentences were as complicated in style as if he was still speaking in the *Chambre*. Then I said to him. « Oh ! well, let us settle this matter » ! His Excellency admitted that you were in bad odour with the Chaplain General. In short, after inquiring among my colleagues, I ascertained that you had been talking rather rashly about a certain Abbé Troubert, merely Vicar General, but the most important personage in the district where he represents the congregation. I replied to the Minister for you, taking the responsibility on my own shoulders. My good nephew, if you want to make your way in the world, make no enemy in the priesthood. Go quickly to Tours and make your peace with this devil of a Vicar General. Learn that Vicars General are men with whom

we must always live in peace. *Morbleu*, when we are all working to reestablish religion, it is stupid for a Naval lieutenant who wants to be made Captain to try and bring priests into discredit. If you don't make this up with the Abbé Troubert, do not count upon me any more. I shall have nothing to do with you. The Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs spoke to me just now about this man as likely to be a bishop. If Troubert took a dislike to our family he could prevent me from being included in the next list of peers. Do you understand? »

These words enlightened the lieutenant as to Troubert's secret occupations, and Birotteau's silly remark, « I don't know what is the use of his sitting up all night. »

The Canon's position in the midst of the female senate which so cleverly composed his police force of the district, and his personal capacity, had contributed to his being chosen by the devout assemblage from amongst the whole of the ecclesiastics of the town, to be the unknown proconsul for Touraine. Archbishop, general, *préfet*, great and small, were under his secret domination. The Baron de Listomère soon came to a decision.

« I don't want », said he to his uncle, « to get

another ecclesiastical broadside on my water line. »

Three days after this diplomatic conference between the uncle and nephew, the sailor, suddenly come back to Tours by the mail coach, let his aunt know, the very evening of his arrival, regarding the dangers which the dearest hopes of the Listomère family were running if they persisted, between them, in supporting this stupid ass Birotteau. The Baron got hold of Monsieur de Bourbonne just as the old gentleman was taking his hat and stick to go away after the rubber of whist. The old man's knowledge was indispensable to save the Listomère's from running on to the breakers which threatened them ahead, and the crafty old gentleman had only made this early move in order to whisper into the Baron's ear, « Stop, we must have a few words together ».

The Baron's sudden return, his air of contentment, in contradistinction to the gravity at certain times depicted on his countenance, had vaguely indicated to Monsieur de Bourbonne that the lieutenant had received a few checks in his cruise against Gamard and Troubert. He evinced no surprise on hearing the Baron announce the secret power of this devoted party's Vicar General.

« I knew it », said he.

« Well », exclaimed the Baroness, « why did not you warn us? »

« Madame », he replied warmly, « forget that I guessed the invisible influence of this priest, and I shall forget that you also know it. If we do not keep this secret we should pass as his accomplices; we would be dreaded and hated. Copy me : pretend to have been duped : but be careful as to where you tread. I had said enough about this to you, you did not understand me at all, and I did not wish to compromise myself. »

« How should we act now said the Baron? »

To give up Birotteau was not a question, it was the chief condition understood amongst these three holding converse together.

« To beat a retreat with the honors of war has always been the masterpiece of the most able generals », replied Monsieur de Bourbonne. « Give way to Troubert; if his hatred is less pronounced than his vanity, you will make an ally of him : but if you stoop too much, he will crush you, for Boileau said. »

Abime tout plutôt, c'est l'esprit de l'Eglise (1)

Make believe that you are leaving the Service,

(1) Destroy everything rather than yield, is the maxim of the Church.

and you will get clear of him, Monsieur le Baron. Send away the curate, Madame, and you will benefit the Gamard. Ask the Abbé Troubert, at the Archbishop's, if he knows whist. He will say « yes ». Ask him to come and make up a game in this drawing-room where he wants to be received. He will be sure to come. You are a woman and know how to work this priest in your interests. When the Baron will be captain, his uncle a peer of France, and Troubert bishop, you will be able to make Birotteau a Canon at your ease. Up till then give way, but do so with grace, yet firmly. Your family can give as much support to Troubert as he will give you : you will get on capitally together. Besides, go ahead with the lead always ready to heave, sailor. »

« Poor Birotteau », said the Baroness.

« Oh, have done with him quickly », replied the old gentleman while preparing to go. « If some clever Liberal were to get hold of this empty head, he would give you some trouble. After all, the Law Courts would give it in his favor and Troubert must be afraid as to the decision. He can still forgive you for having begun the fight. But after a defeat he would be relentless. That is all I have to say. »

He snapped his snuff-box, went to put on his galoshes, and left.

Next morning, after breakfast, the Baroness was left alone with the curate and said to him. not without considerable embarrassment : « My dear Monsieur Birotteau, you will find my requests very unjust and inconsistent : but it is necessary for you and for us, first of all to cancel your lawsuit against Mademoiselle Gamard at the same time waiving your claims, and then to leave my house. » On hearing these words the poor priest turned pale. « I am », she went on, « the innocent cause of your misfortunes, and know that had it not been for my nephew you would not have entered into this action which is now causing your trouble, and ours. But listen. »

She briefly told him the very great extent this affair had, and explained the gravity of its consequences. Thinking out the case during the night she had made out the probable antecedents of Troubert's life; she was able then to prove pretty accurately to Birotteau concerning the plots in which this craftily woven vengeance had enveloped him, reveal to him the great capacity, the power of his enemy in himself in displaying hatred, in himself in discerning motives, while showing

up Troubert to him as crouching for twelve years before Chapeloud, devouring Chapeloud, and persecuting Chapeloud again in his friend. The innocent Birotteau joined his hands as if to pray, and wept with grief at the aspect of human horrors such as his poor mind had never had the least suspicion of. As frightened as if he had been on the edge of a precipice, his eyes staring and watery, but without giving vent to any expression, he listened to the words of his benefactress, who said in conclusion : « I fully recognise how badly I am treating you in thus throwing you over; but my dear Abbé, the duties of family come before those of friendship. Submit, as I am doing to this storm; I will prove my deep gratitude to you for it. I am not speaking of your interests, I am seeing to that myself. You need have no anxiety in regard to your daily requirements. Through Monsieur de Bourbonne, who knows how to do things without their being remarked upon, I shall arrange so that you will want for nothing. My friend, give me the right to betray you. I shall remain your friend while conforming to the ways of the world. Decide ».

The poor stupefied Abbé exclaimed : « Chapeloud was right therefore, in saying that if Troubert could come and drag him by the feet from his tomb

he would do so. He sleeps in Chapeloud's bed. »

« There is no use in bewailing », said Madame de Listomère; « we have little time left. »

Birotteau had too good a nature not to obey the first impulse of the moment in great crises. Besides, his life was already nothing more than torture. Casting a despairing look at his protectress, which almost broke her heart, he said : « I trust in you. I'm nothing more than a *bourrier* (1) in the street.

This Touraine word has no other possible equivalent than *a bit of straw*; but there are some pretty little bits of straw, yellow, glossy, shining, which give pleasure to children : whilst the *bourrier* is the discolored bit of straw, muddy, rolled in the gutter, blown about by the storm, and crushed under the feet of passers-by.

« But, Madame, I do not wish to leave Chapeloud's portrait with the Abbé Troubert; it was done for me; it belongs to me; arrange for it to be given back to me, and I will give up all the rest. »

« Well », said Madame de Listomère, I will go to Mademoiselle Gamard's. These words were uttered in a tone that revealed the great effort it

(1) Scavenger.

cost the Baroness de Listomère in thus stooping to flatter the old maid's pride. « And », she said, « I will try and arrange everything. I hardly dare to hope for it though. Go and see Monsieur de Bourbonne so that he may draft out your abstention from further legal procedure in due form, and bring me the deed when drawn out ; then, with the Archbishop's help we shall perhaps be able to settle the matter. »

Birotteau went out terrified. In his eyes Troubert had assumed the dimensions of an Egyptian pyramid. This man's hands were in Paris, and his elbows in the cloister of Saint-Gatien.

« He », he said to himself, « prevent the Marquis de Listomère from becoming a peer? And perhaps with the Archbishop's help the matter will be settled. »

In face of matters of such importance Birotteau felt like a mite : he did himself justice.

The news of Birotteau's leaving Madame de Listomère's was as surprising as the reason for it was inscrutable. Madame de Listomère said that her nephew wished to marry and leave the Navy, and in order to make his apartment large enough she required Birotteau's rooms. No one knew as yet of Birotteau's abstention from a law-suit. Thus

Monsieur de Bourbonne's directions were judiciously carried out. These two pieces of news coming to the ears of the tall vicar should flatter his *amour-propre* in letting him know that, if not capitulating, the Listomère family was at least remaining neutral, and silently recognising the secret power of the congregation. Is not to recognise to submit? But the law-suit was remaining entirely *sub judice*. Was not this giving way and threatening at the same time?

In this contest therefore, the Listomère's had taken an attitude precisely similar to the tall vicar's: they kept themselves out of it and were able to direct. But a serious event happened and made the success of Monsieur de Bourbonne's and the Listomère's designs to appease the Gamard and Troubert party still more difficult. The evening before, Mademoiselle Gamard contracted a chill when coming out of the cathedral, had been put to bed, and was said to be dangerously ill. The whole town resounded with expostulations, the outcome of pretended pity. « Mademoiselle Gamard's feelings have not been able to stand the scandal of this lawsuit. In spite of her being undoubtedly in the right, she was going to die of grief. Birotteau was killing his benefactress...

Such was the substance of the remarks thrown out by the capillary tubes of the great female conventicle, and kindly repeated by the town of Tours.

Madame de Listomère had the unpleasantness of having come to the old maid's without reaping the fruits of her visit. She asked very politely to speak to the Vicar General. Flattered perhaps by receiving in Chapeloud's library and at that hearth, graced by the two famous pictures then being contested, a woman who had refused to know him, Troubert let the Baroness wait a moment : then he consented to give her a hearing. Never had courtier or diplomatist put more skill, dissimulation, and penetration into the discussion of their particular interests or the conducting of some national negotiation, than the Baroness and the Abbé displayed when they were both together alone.

Like the introducer who, in the middle ages, used to arm the champion and fortify his valour with useful advice when he was about to enter the lists, the cunning old gentleman had said to the Baroness ; « Don't forget your part, you are a reconciler and not an interested party. Troubert is equally a mediator. Weigh your words. Study

the inflections of the Vicar General's voice. If he strokes his chin you will have got your way with him. »

Some artists have amused themselves by caricaturing the frequent contrast existing between what one says and what one thinks. Here, in order to thoroughly grasp the interest in the duel of words which took place between the priest and the *grande dame*, it is necessary to disclose the thoughts that they both had under some apparently insignificant sentences. Madame de Listomère began by testifying to the sorrow that the Birotteau law-suit was causing her; then she spoke of the wish she had to see this affair finish to the satisfaction of both parties.

« The harm is done, Madame », said the Abbé in a grave voice, « the virtuous Mademoiselle Gamard is dying. » (*I am no more interested in this stupid maid than in Prêtre-Jean* (1), he thought, *but I should like to put her death on your shoulders and let your conscience prick you, if you are silly enough to be anxious about it*).

« On hearing of her illness, Monsieur, » replied the Baroness, « I prevailed upon the curate to

(1) A fabulous personage of the Middle Ages.

draw up an abstention from further legal procedure, which I was bringing to this saintly maiden. » (*I see through you, artful rogue, thought she, but we are sheltered allright from your fickleness. As to you, if you take the abstention you will let yourself in for it, and thus admit your complicity*).

A moment's silence ensued.

« Mademoiselle Gamard's temporal affairs do not concern me », said the priest at last, while lowering his deep eyelids over his eagle eyes to hide his feelings. (*Oh, oh, you shall not compromise me, but God be praised, the cursed lawyers will not plead an action which could contaminate me. What do the Listomères want therefore to thus turn themselves into my servants*).

« Monsieur, » replied the Baroness, « Monsieur Birotteau's affairs are as foreign to me as Mademoiselle Gamard's interests are to you : but unfortunately religion might suffer from this trial and I regard you as a mediator, while I am acting as conciliator. » (*We need not abuse one another, Monsieur Troubert, she thought. Do you perceive the laconoic turn of this reply?*)

« Religion suffer, Madame », said the tall vicar.
« Religion stands too high for men to do it harm. »

(*Religion is myself*, thought he.) « God will judge us without mistake, Madame », he added, « I recognise His tribunal only. »

« Well Monsieur », she replied, « let us try to reconcile the judgments of men with those of God. » (*Yes, religion is you.*)

The Abbé Troubert changed his tone. « Has not your nephew gone to Paris ? » (*You have heard news of me from there*, he thought. *I can crush you, you who despised me. You have come to capitulate.*)

« Yes, Monsieur, I thank you for the interest you take in him. He returns to Paris this evening. He has been sent for by the Minister, who is most friendly disposed towards us, and does not wish to see him leave the Service. » (*Jesuit, you won't be able to crush us*, she thought, *and your little joke is understood.*) A moment's silence followed. « I don't consider his conduct in this affair has been quite becoming », she continued, « but one must pardon a sailor for not being a judge as to what is right. » (*Let us make alliance*, she thought. *We shall gain nothing by declaring war.*)

A slight smile from the Abbé melted into the wrinkles of his face. « He has done us a service in letting us know the value of these two paint-

ings », he said, while looking at the pictures ;
« they will be a handsome ornament for the Chapel of the Virgin. » (*You shot an epigram at me, he thought, here are two, we are quits Madame.*)

« If you should give them to St-Gatien, I would ask you to allow me to present the church with some frames worthy of the building and of the work. » (*I should like to make you admit that you coveted Birotteau's furniture, she thought.*)

« They do not belong to me », said the priest, keeping always on his guard.

« But here, » said Madame de Listomère, « is a deed which puts an end to all discussion, and gives them over to Mademoiselle Gamard. » She placed the written abstention from further proceedings on the table. (*See Monsieur, she thought how much confidence I have in you.*) « It is worthy of you, Monsieur », she added, « worthy of your fine character, to reconcile two Christians : although I now take little interest in Monsieur Birotteau. »

« But he is staying with you, » said he interrupting.

« No, Monsieur, he is no longer at my house. » (*My brother-in-law's peerage and my nephew's pro-*

motion have indeed made me guilty of mean behaviour, she thought.)

The Abbé remained unmoved, but his calm attitude indicated the strongest feelings. Monsieur de Bourbonne had alone guessed the secret of this apparent peace. The priest was conquering !

« Then why have you taken charge of this abstention », he asked, stimulated by a feeling analogous to that which presses a woman to make herself repeat some compliments.

« I cannot help sympathising with others. Birotteau, whose weak character is doubtless known to you, begged me to see Mademoiselle Gamard, in order to obtain from her in lieu of his renunciation to... »

The Abbé frowned.

« To rights recognised by distinguished lawyers, the portrait... »

The priest looked up at Madame de Listomère.

« The portrait of Chapeloud », she said, continuing. — I leave you to be judge of his claim. (*You will be condemned if you wish to plead, she thought.*)

The intonation given by the Baroness, when pro-

nouncing the words *distinguished lawyers*, conveyed to the priest that she knew the enemy's strong and weak points. Madame de Listomère displayed so much ability to this master connoisseur in the course of the conversation which was maintained for some time on this topic, that the Abbé went down to Mademoiselle Gamard's apartment, to find out her reply to the proposed transaction.

Troubert soon came back.

« Madame, these are the words of the poor dying woman : *Monsieur l'Abbé Châpeloud has shown me too much friendship for me to let his portrait be taken away*, As for me, he went on, if it belonged to me, I would not give it up to anyone. The sentiments I entertained towards the poor departed one were too faithful for me to be deprived of the right of vieing with others for his picture. »

« Monsieur, do not let us fall out about an indifferent picture. » (*I don't care any more than you don't care*, she thought.) « Keep it, we will have a copy made. I congratulate myself in having been able to hush up this sad and deplorable case, and through it I personally will have gained the pleasure of knowing you. I have heard that you are a good whist player. You will forgive a woman

being curious », she smilingly said. « If you would like to come and play sometimes at my house, you need have no doubt as to the welcome that you will receive there. »

Troubert stroked his chin. (*He is caught. Bourbonne was right, she thought, he has his share of vanity.*)

In fact, at that moment the tall vicar was experiencing the delicious sensation which Mirabeau was unable to resist, when, at the time of his power, he saw the gateway of a house formerly closed to him opening before his carriage.

« Madame », he replied, « I am too busy to go into society : but for you what would one not do ? » *The old maid is going to snuff out, I shall take up with the Listomères, and be of service to them if they will be of service to me, he thought. Much better to have them as friends than enemies.*)

Madame de Listomère returned to her house hoping that the Archbishop would complete the achievement of peace so happily begun. But Birotteau was not even to benefit by his abstention. Madame de Listomère heard next morning of the death of Mademoiselle Gamard. When the old maid's will was opened, no one was surprised to hear that she had made the Abbé Troubert her

sole legatee. Her estate was valued at one hundred thousand écus. The Vicar General sent two invitation cards to Madame de Listomère's house, for the service and for the funeral, one for Madame de Listomère and one for her nephew.

« We must go », she said.

« It cannot be otherwise », exclaimed Monsieur de Bourbonne. « It is a test by which the Abbé Troubert wishes to judge you. Baron, go as far as the cemetery », he added, while turning towards the lieutenant, who, unfortunately for him, had not left Tours.

The service took place and partook of great ecclesiastical magnificence. One solitary person wept at it. It was Birotteau, who, alone in a side chapel, and without being seen, believed himself culpable for this death, and prayed sincerely for the soul of the deceased, bitterly deploring not having obtained her pardon for his wrongs. The Abbé Troubert accompanied his friend's body to the grave it was to be interred in. The graveside reached, he delivered an address in which, thanks to his ability, the description of the narrow life led by the testatrix assumed enormous proportions. Those present took note of the following words in the peroration.

« This life full of days acquired by God and His religion, this life decorated by so many fine deeds done in silence, by so many modest and unknown virtues, was rent by a sorrow which we would call unmerited, if, on the brink of Eternity, we could forget that all our afflictions are sent to us by God. The many friends of this saintly maiden, knowing the nobility and openness of her soul, foretold that she could support everything, except the suspicions which tainted her very existence. Perhaps, also, Providence has brought her to God's bosom in order to take her away from our miseries. Happy those who can rest, here below, in peace with themselves, as Sophie now rests in the abode of the blessed in her robe of innocence ! »

« When he had finished this pompous address », resumed Monsieur de Bourbonne, who was telling Madame de Listomère about the funeral, while, after their sets at cards and the windows having been closed they were alone with the Baron, « just fancy, if it be possible, this Louis XI in a cassock thus finishing up by sprinkling Holy Water on the scene. » Monsieur de Bourbonne, taking up the tongs, imitated the Abbé Troubert so well, that the Baron and his aunt could not help smiling.

« There, at any rate », went on the old gentleman, he has stultified himself. Up to that point he had borne himself perfectly, but doubtless, when sealing up this old maid for ever, whom he treated with supreme contempt and hated perhaps as much as he detested Chapeloud, it was impossible for him to prevent his delight from coming out in a gesture. »

Next morning Mademoiselle Salomon came to lunch with Madame de Listomère, excitedly exclaiming on arrival : « Our poor Abbé Birotteau has just received a terrible blow, showing the most studied hatred. He is appointed Parish Priest of Saint-Symphorien. »

Saint-Symphorien is a suburb of Tours situated on the other side of the bridge. This bridge, one of the finest works of French architecture, is nineteen hundred feet long and the two squares at either end are exactly similar.

« Do you take this in », she continued after a pause and quite astonished at the indifference shown by Madame de Listomère on hearing this news. « The Abbé Birotteau, there, will be as if a hundred leagues from Tours, from his friends, and everything. Is not this a banishment all the more frightful, since he is torn away from the town that he

will see in front of him every day, and to which he can scarcely ever come? He, who after his misfortunes can hardly walk, will be obliged to do a league to see us. At this moment the poor man is in bed, he has an attack of fever. The priest's house at Saint-Symphorien is cold and damp, and the parish is not well enough off to put it in repair. The poor old man will therefore find himself buried in a veritable sepulchre. What a terrible state of affairs. »

Now to wind up this tale it will perhaps suffice merely to detail a few events and sketch a final portrait.

Five months later the Vicar General was made bishop. Madame de Listomère was dead, and left fifteen hundred francs a year to the Abbé Birotteau in her will. The very day that the Baroness's will was made known, Monsignor Hyacinth, Bishop of Troyes, was on the point of leaving Tours to go and live in his diocese: but he put off his departure. Furious at having been taken in by a woman to whom he was friendly disposed and who was secretly friendly with the man whom he looked upon as his enemy, Troubert again threatened the Baron's future and the Marquis de Listomère's peerage. Before a

large assemblage in the Archbishop's drawing-room he let fall one of those ecclesiastical expressions, redolent of vengeance and full of honeyed mildness. The ambitious sailor came to see this relentless priest, who doubtless dictated hard terms to him; for the Baron's conduct evinced the most thorough appropriation to the wishes of this terrible congregationalist. The newly created bishop arranged for Mademoiselle Gamard's house to be legally made over to the Cathedral Chapter, he gave Chapeloud's library and books to the little Seminary, and dedicated the two contested pictures to the Chapel of the Virgin. But he kept Chapeloud's portrait. No one could account for this almost entire surrendering of Mademoiselle Gamard's inheritance. Monsieur de Bourbonne supposed that the bishop was secretly keeping the ready money so as to suitably maintain his position in Paris, if he should be called to occupy a bishop's seat in the Upper Chamber. At last, the evening before Monsignor Troubert's departure, the crafty old gentleman was able to discover the meaning of the last straw which was up till then such a mystery, namely the *coup de grâce*, given with the most indefatigable of all kinds of vengeance to the

weakest of all victims. Madame de Listomère's legacy to Birotteau was contested by the Baron de Listomère on the plea of its having been inveigled out of her. A few days after the issue of the writ to appear before the court, the Baron was promoted Captain. By exercise of a disciplinary measure the Parish Priest of St-Symphorien was suspended. The ecclesiastical authorities judged the case beforehand. Sophie Gamard's assassin was therefore a rascal. If Monsignor Troubert had kept the old maid's inheritance, it might have been difficult to put any blame upon Birotteau.

As Monsignor Hyacinth, Bishop of Troyes, was passing along the river side at St-Symphorien in a postchaise on his way to Paris, the poor Abbé Birotteau had been placed in an arm-chair on a terrace above in the sun. This poor priest, reprimanded by his archbishop, was pale and thin. Affliction stamped upon his features, completely altered the countenance once so gentle and cheerful. Illness cast a veil over his eyes, formerly so animated by the pleasures of good living and without a dull idea, a veil which simulated thought. It was but the skeleton of Birotteau which, a year before, so vacant but so happy, used to roll across the Cloister. The bishop cast a look of

contempt upon his victim, then consented to forget him, and passed by.

No doubt in other times Troubert would have been a Hildebrand or Alexander VI. Today the Church is no longer a political power, and it no longer absorbs the energies of individual people. Celibacy therefore presents this great defect, that making man's qualities converge upon a single passion, egotism, it renders bachelors either dangerous or useless. We are living in a period when the fault of governments is to make society for man less than man for society. A perpetual strife exists between the individual against the system which wants to exploit him and which he tries to exploit to his profit; whilst formerly man, really freer, showed himself more generous for the public welfare. The circle in the midst of which men are moving has become imperceptibly extended: the mind which can take in the synthesis of it will never be but a great exception: for, usually, in morals as in physical science, the movement loses in intensity what it gains in extent. Society should not be based upon exceptions. At first man was purely and simply a father, and his heart beat warmly in the radiance of his family. Later he lived for a clan or a little

republic. Hence the great historical devotedness of Greece or of Rome. Then he became the man of a caste or a religion, often showing himself sublime for their grandeur; but then the field of his interests increased itself in all intellectual regions. Today his life is attached to that of an immense fatherland; it is said his family will soon be the whole world. Would not this moral cosmopolitanism, the hope of Christian Rome, be a sublime error? It is so natural to believe in the realisation of a noble chimera, and in the fraternity of men. But, alas, the human machine is not of such divine proportions. Minds great enough to embrace a sentimentality reserved to great men, will never be those, either of simple citizens, or of the fathers of families. Certain physiologists think that when the brain is thus enlarged the heart would become more contracted. A mistake! Is not the apparent egotism of men who carry a science, a nation, or some laws in their breasts, the most noble of passions, and in some sort the maternity of masses; to bring forth new people or to produce new ideas, ought they not to unite in their wise heads the breasts of woman with the power of God? The history of people like Innocent III, like Peter the Great, and of all

the leaders of a century or of a nation would prove, as the case may be, in a very marked degree, the immense mind represented by Troubert in the heart of the Cloister of St-Gatien.

SAINT-FIRMIN, April 1832.

TOURS, BURÉ AND CY



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